

Interpreting Mysticism
An evaluation of Steven T. Katz’s argument against a common core in mysticism and mystical experience

In his 1978 article “Language, epistemology, and mysticism”, Steven T. Katz presents his theory of the interpretation of mystical experience reports in which the foundational epistemological claim is that “there are no pure experiences”. Around this claim, a theory of interpretation is developed that implies the rejection of a common core in mystical experience. This also involves a criticism against the so called perennial interpretations of mystical experience and of the phenomenal characteristics that are considered to be prevalent in mystical experiences across traditional religious boundaries. Katz’s theory has been interpreted and criticised as a ‘constructivist’ theory of meaning, implying cognitive relativism and non-realism for the experiences of mystics, though in the light of Katz’s own claims, his theory should be understood as a ‘contextualist’ theory which allows for reality to impact on the individual mystics experience. As a theory of interpretation, purporting to be superior to the perennial models of interpretation, Katz’s theory is evaluated in terms of ‘scientific value’ for the interpretation of mystical reports.

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UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

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AGAINST A COMMON CORE IN MYSTICISM AND
MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE**

MONICA KIMMEL

**DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES, THEOLOGY AND CLASSICAL
PHILOLOGY
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Part I: Method

Chapter 1 **Methodological considerations**

Introduction to chapter one

Research on ‘mysticism’ has been conducted within diverse disciplines, through a vast diversity of methodological applications, and with a variety of phenomena in mind. Psychologists and sociologists of religion have primarily focused on the psychological mechanisms and qualitative aspects of mystical experience, as well as on the pathological and therapeutic outcomes of experiences classified as ‘mystical’. These investigations largely circle around the experiences of mystics and the states of consciousness confirmed by their reports, by the results of various neurological and biological measures, and by any post-experiential attitudinal and/or behavioural changes that may have been reported or observed. Exegetical approaches, on the other hand, focus less on the experiences of mystics and more on their writings – and perhaps other expressive modes such as art or music – which, of course, are not always about their mystical experiences per se. Hermeneutical methods as well as theories of language and of mystical truth-claims dominate the exegetical disciplines.

This brief introduction to the field indicates that in interpreting the experiences, activities and declarations of mystics, the investigator of mystical phenomena has a variety of disciplines and methods to choose from. And while there is no general agreement as to how mysticism and mystical experience should be defined, many of the methodological

approaches mentioned above are grounded upon the assumption that there are common experiential and/or descriptive characteristics of mystical experiences across religious traditions. In 1978, with what turned out to be a pivotal article on the subject, the philosopher Steven T. Katz posed a challenge to this widely (and long) held point of view.

Katz's frequently quoted article, "Language, epistemology, and mysticism",¹ posited that rather than being universal phenomena that transcend religious and sociocultural boundaries, mystical experiences are particular and largely tied to the specific religious tradition from which a given mystic springs. It is this 'Katzian' perspective, and the wave of agreement, disagreement, controversy and confusion it has generated, that will be the focus of this thesis.

In his article, Katz criticizes the 'perennial' notion that diverse mystical experiences display a common core, and proposes his 'contextualist' understanding as a viable alternative to this view. According to Katz's contextual approach, the experiences of mystics in each of the world's great mystical traditions are, in large measure, predetermined² by the 'context' of their specific religious training and education. In other words, it is the mystic's background of particular religious understanding that shapes, educates and/or conditions her to have the experiences she

¹ The most recent reference being in John Hick's; *The new frontier of religion and science – religious experience, neuroscience and the transcendent*, where Hick refers to the work done on the epistemological issues concerning mysticism in Katz's edited anthology from 1978 (*Mysticism and philosophical analysis*) in which "Language, epistemology, and mysticism" is included. (See Hick 2007, p. 14) In Geels 1998, the reference is also to the above mentioned anthology, where Geels emphasises the importance of considering the 'novelty' in Katz's perspective by quoting Katz on the weaknesses of the past research done on mysticism. (Geels 1998, pp. 11-12) It would be overreaching to say that Katz's article is introducing the new interpretational paradigm, though since it is claimed to stand in sharp contrast to the 'old' view (the 'perennialist' view, as Katz calls it), perhaps it is not very misleading to characterise Katz's position in these terms. References to the contents in Katz's works are seldom critical, but are rather taking for granted the philosophical presuppositions embedded in the 'contextualist' theory presented by Katz. The various reactions to this 'new' view (like Robert Forman's criticism and William P Gregory's defense) also indicate that this has become a matter of 'choosing sides', although if the philosophical unclarity in Katz's position are taken into account this may not be the case. This issue will be elucidated in the coming chapters.

² In fact, "over-determined", as we can read in Katz 1978a, p. 47.

has. Different religious contexts thus produce different types of mystical experiences that cannot be equated one to the other by some kind of ‘common core’.

For the last three decades, Katz has maintained the validity of the contextual thesis originally presented in “Language, epistemology, and mysticism”, and complemented it with a series of articles concerning the character of mystical experience (1983), the ethical involvement of mystics in eastern and western traditions (1992), the functions of the language of mystics (1992), and the interpretation of mystical literature (2000). Over that same period, his theory has elicited a chorus of positive and negative reactions from the scholarly community regarding both the details of his theory and the somewhat harder to grasp totality of his work on mysticism.

A quick glance at the comments on Katz’s theoretical stance affords two preliminary observations: first, there appears to be no consensus concerning how to interpret certain details of his contextual approach (which, of course, affects the remarks of both critics and supporters alike); and second, there are apparently widespread concerns regarding a number of significant issues that continue to remain unresolved (primarily with respect to methodology). In consideration of these factors, as well as the fact that Katz considers his contextualist interpretations and explanations of mystical experience to be most accurate, the aim of this investigation is to take a critical look at Katz’s contribution to the understanding of these phenomena.

This first chapter consists of a preliminary examination of Katz’s ideas and a presentation of the problems that have sparked the controversy. It also highlights the methodological problems entailed in analysing Katz’s position from a phenomenological perspective and introduces the approach employed in this thesis to uncover the fundamental weaknesses of his theory.

1.1. The problems in abstract

In assessing the “common-core” or “perennialist” perspective, as he interchangeably terms it, Katz calls into question a number of philosophical systems and methodological approaches. As such, authors

on mysticism as diverse as William James, Aldous Huxley, Walter Stace and others are bundled under one heading and viewed as having made similar errors in judgment, all of which appear somehow connected to the ‘mistaken’ notion that there is a common core in mystical experience. Among these errors in judgment, Katz includes: 1) the assumption that there is such a thing as a ‘pure’ (unmediated) experience; and, 2) the devaluation of the difficulties entailed in drawing a distinction between experience and interpretation. In Katz’s analysis, these two errors have been instrumental in the failure of perennialists to appreciate the differences in the mystical experiences (and mystical experience reports) of mystics coming from diverse confessional settings.

In “Language, epistemology, and mysticism” (1978), Katz calls upon his readers to understand his perspective as a “plea for the recognition of differences”,³ these being the differences in phenomenal⁴ content between the experiences of different mystics. In other words, where proponents of “common core” see phenomenal similarities in the experiences of mystics, Katz’s sees phenomenal differences. This contrast between the perennial common core account and Katz’s contextual approach is the most striking and prominent feature of Katz’s theory. Closer examination of his position, however, reveals a number of interrelated problems concerning the phenomena of mystical experience, and experience in general.

Why does Katz see differences where other interpreters of mysticism see similarities? According to Katz, the problem with perennial typologies of mystical experience is that they fail to “delineate what mystical experience actually is”⁵ and are too unsophisticated “in their recognition of the contextual basis of language which makes them incapable of sorting out the actual meaning of mystical reports”.⁶ Whether or not

³ Katz 1978a, p. 25.

⁴ The postulated common-core characteristics of mystical experience have been commonly termed ‘phenomenological characteristics’ in the literature on mysticism. As this is inappropriate for several reasons in the context of this thesis, I reserve the term ‘phenomenological’ for what relates to the theoretical content of *phenomenology*, and use the term ‘phenomenal’ to designate characteristics of *experience*.

⁵ Katz 1978a, p. 51.

⁶ Katz 1978a, p. 51.

Katz is correct in his assessment, clearly the attempt to differentiate between various mystical experiences and to probe the meaning of various mystical reports are essential aims of those interested in resolving the complex of problems surrounding the interpretation of mystical phenomena. It is also clear that questions concerning differentiation must first be answered before anything genuinely meaningful can be said about mysticism, mystical experience and/or mystical experience reports. The first step in “sort[ing] out the actual meaning of mystical reports” is to sort out *which* mystics are specifically being referred to. For instance, if it turns out that the mystics referred to by Katz in his theoretical writings are different from those studied by ‘perennial’ philosophers, there will be obvious problems in attempting to ascertain “the actual meaning of mystical reports”, and also to reach some sort of consensus. Moreover, even if we manage to delineate what “mystical experience actually is”, and thus identify the same class of mystics, we must still relate this experiential ‘isness’ to “the actual meaning of mystical reports”—an enterprise not entirely free from obstacles.

The difficulties involved in ascertaining the “actual meaning of mystical reports” go beyond those concerning the nature of the experiences of mystics. First, there is the issue of the ‘mystical reports’ themselves, which do not necessarily contain direct descriptions of given ‘mystical experiences’. Second, even when they do (something not always easy to determine), one requires an account of the process of translation between an experience and its linguistic description, that is, an account of how the experiences are represented in textual form. The ‘perennial’ account of this relation (i.e. the relation between experiential and linguistic meaning) is more or less as follows: while a given mystic’s *post-experiential* linguistic interpretations may reflect his or her religious and/or sociocultural context, the experience itself exhibits certain structural features that link it to the experiences of mystics from other traditions and transcend the textual particularities of the tradition in question. In other words, despite the diversity of Realities found in mystical experience reports, these descriptions also reveal fundamental experiential factors: a ‘common core’ that unites them all.

In Katz's understanding of the perennial position, this 'common core' is often equated with the notion of 'pure experience'. An example of this can be found in Forman (1999), where "unitive" experiences, cognitive yet non-conceptual experiences, and "pure" experiences (non-intentional or "object-less" experiences) are thought to be found in the reports of mystics from several different traditions. Katz is generally dissatisfied with this type of account,⁷ and proposes instead that "there are NO pure (i.e. unmediated) experiences".⁸ Moreover, if, as Katz claims, all experience is inescapably mediated by the concepts of the mystic, there is no need for an account of the process of translation – i.e. the mystic describes her experience with the same conceptual set that made her experience what it was. The only account Katz can give regarding the relation between an experience and its report – the extant textual 'evidence' – is that they are difficult to distinguish.

Katz's proposition that there are no 'pure' (unmediated) experiences also appears to undermine the frequent claims of both mystics and perennialists regarding the ineffable nature of mystical experience.⁹ If there is no fundamental difference between the experiences of mystics and their reporting of such experiences, the problem of ineffability

⁷ In his Introduction to the anthology, "Mysticism and Religious Traditions" (1983), Katz describes this view as follows: "Tragically, the mystic must descend from his height and then, caught up again in the fetters of tradition and history, space and time, he must express what is truly inexpressible in the inadequate symbols and syntax of his particular faith community. Thus the One becomes the many and the absolute becomes Krishna and Allah, God and Tao, and is alluded to through such inadequate symbols as Torah and Koran, Mantra and Gospel, Koans and Chants." And in "Mystical speech and mystical meaning" he says: "Trapped by the unclosable abyss between experience and utterance, the adept uses a language he or she knows to be necessarily inferior, hopelessly inadequate to the task at hand. Such futilely employed language is most often the familiar tongue of a particular religious tradition and specific sociohistorical environment, but this is merely an unavoidable contingency" (Katz 1992a, p. 3).

⁸ Katz 1978a, p. 26.

⁹ In this regard, Katz notes that, "contrary to their own sincere declamations regarding ineffability, the structural logic of such theories necessarily *tells us* more than proponents of apophysis recognize. *And this fact should be taken as paradigmatic of mystical systems universally*; despite their avowal of *neti neti* the reality is otherwise. That is, mystics reveal, however unintentionally, more of the 'truth' they have come to know in language than their overt negations of meaning and content would suggest" (Katz 1992a, p. 25).

appears to vanish: the reports are ‘evidence’ of the experience and we thus ‘know’ about the experiences of mystics through their reports.¹⁰ Moreover, if the mystics have experiences that are shaped by the religious traditions that the mystics have inherited, the degree to which an experience can be said to be ineffable must reflect the degree to which the religious tradition of the mystic is ineffable – i.e. not at all. According to Katz, mystics report exactly what they experience, that is, there is a one-to-one relation between the report and the experience, and the experiences are reflections of the mystic’s religious background and training.¹¹

In addition to the problem of the relationship between a mystical experience and a mystical experience report, there appears to be the problem of establishing the exact relationship between the experience and the pre-experiential “conditioning” of consciousness. In this regard, Katz’s understanding appears to teeter between two explanatory poles. On the one hand, he implies that the mystic’s experience is highly

¹⁰ Regarding the experiences of mystics, Katz claims that “the only evidence we have, if we are not mystics ourselves, and even mystics really do not have a privileged position here, is the account given by mystics of their experience. These are the data of study and analysis” (Katz 1983a, p. 5). It is helpful to bear in mind that in Katz’s view, not only is the mystical account a reflection of the mystic’s experience (in a precise ‘one-to-one’ relationship), but the mystical experience is itself a reflection of the mystic’s conceptual inheritance.

¹¹ For example, in his article “The conservative character of mystical experience” (1983), Katz states that “there is a one-to-one relationship between inherited and shared doctrine, and the ‘model’ experienced”. We discuss Katz’s understanding of the term ‘model’ in chapter five, but for now it can suffice to say that for Katz ‘models’ are the ‘idols’ of particular religious traditions, e.g., Jesus for the Christian or Muhammad for the Muslim. Also, in response to the perennialist claim that it is useful (although admittedly difficult) to distinguish between post-experiential descriptions and ‘core’ mystical experiences, Katz states: “To think that the ‘unitive’ mystic merely describes his experience in this way is to distort the situation which gave rise to the experience, the experience itself, and the report of the experience. Thus, for example, seriously to credit that Augustine did not have the unitive experience described in his *Confessions* (Bk. 9) but only used this language is unwarranted for two strong reasons at least; (1) surely an Augustine would not consciously *mis*describe his experience; (2) the theory of *mis*description due to orthodox pressures is untenable in Augustine’s case because, in fact, the unitive account he gives is more in conflict, though little did he seem to know it, with Christian orthodoxy than a relational description would have been” (Katz 1978a, p. 42). These issues are discussed at more length in chapter three.

determined by the conceptual content of her religious tradition, and on the other, he holds out the possibility that said experience is somehow the experiencing of an independent Reality. Thus there appears to be a tension between Katz's strong conviction regarding both the pre-experiential and post-experiential conditioning of mystical experiences and his 'Realist' view that such experiences nonetheless involve something that goes beyond these determinants. As will be seen, it is the pull of these apparently contradictory positions that have rightly or wrongly contributed to the various criticisms of Katz's contextual approach.

Two problem areas need to be distinguished here: on the one hand, there are problems arising from Katz's particular interpretation of the theories he criticises; on the other hand, there are problems arising from the application of his theory of mystical experience to the interpretation of mystical reports. As it turns out, these sets of problems are interrelated in Katz's position, implying that in our examination of Katz's philosophy of mysticism we will be concerned with both. It should be noted, however, that this thesis is not intended as an argument in favour of the perennial or common core theories of mysticism, although we might have to follow their lead since Katz presents his contextualist understanding as an alternative approach. In other words, when in the course of our investigation it is indicated that Katz has misinterpreted and/or misrepresented the perennialist view, this should not be taken to imply that we believe the perennial perspective to be right and his contextualist perspective to be wrong. Nonetheless, a thoroughgoing examination of the applicability and utility of Katz's theory will hopefully lead to a more precise comprehension of where he stands relative to the subject of mystical experience. It should also clear up at least part of the misunderstanding that has surrounded Katz's approach, inclining both critics and supporters to variously label it as 'constructivist', 'contextualist', 'hermeneutical', 'phenomenological' or simply 'linguistic'. We will return to these issues in the next section, which contains a more detailed discussion of the applicability of Katz's interpretational theory and the problems entailed therein.

1.1.1. *A summary of the problems*

If Katz is correct, understanding mysticism may turn out to be quite simple, because we can eliminate the problem of translating experience into literature. If the reports of mystics are one-to-one descriptions of their experiences as Katz believes, the phenomenological content of the experience must be reflected in the report. As such, since mystics of diverse backgrounds report experiencing diverse religious Realities such as Brahman, Allah, Nirvana and so forth, they must be having the experience of these different religious Realities. In Katz's view, perennialist thinkers fail to see this because they are too busy framing typologies of mystical experience to ask the more important question of "why the various mystical experiences are the experiences they are."¹² They fail to see that the reports of mystics are merely evidential instantiations of the more general principle that the conditions of experience dictate what is or is not possible to experience and necessitate that experience is never 'pure' but always shaped by pre-experiential expectations, beliefs, and concepts.¹³

Mystical experience(s) are the *result* of traversing the mystical way(s), whatever specific *way* one happens to follow, e.g. the Jewish, Sufi, or Buddhist. What one reads, learns, knows, intends, and experiences along the path creates to some degree (let us leave this somewhat vaguely stated as yet) the *anticipated* experience made manifest. That is to say, there is an intimate, even necessary connection between the mystical and religious text studied and assimilated, the mystical experience had, and the mystical experience reported. In each mystical tradition, as in each of the larger religious communities in which the mystical traditions inhere, there is an inherited theological-mystical education which is built upon certain agreed sources.¹⁴

¹² Katz 1978a, p. 25.

¹³"The significance of these theoretical and methodological considerations is that they entail the view that the forms of consciousness which the mystic brings to an experience set structure and limiting parameters on what the experience will be, i.e. on what will be experienced, and rule out in advance what is 'inexperienceable' in the particular, given, concrete context" (Katz 1983a, p. 5).

¹⁴ Katz 1983a, p. 6. The 'agreed sources' being the Bible, Torah, Qur'an and other Sacred Scripture of the major religious traditions.

The mystics in each mystical tradition learn to experience what they experience through ‘agreed sources’, or:

All these mystical personalities intended and experienced, they had *knowledge by acquaintance*, what their communities taught as *knowledge by description*. They had existential knowledge of what their co-religionists knew only through propositions.¹⁵

As a result of this understanding, Katz views mystical experience as being fundamentally conservative in character as opposed to what he suggests is the “anarchic” perspective of the perennial philosophers he critiques.¹⁶

Katz’s view that mystical experience is never ‘pure’ but always shaped by pre-experiential expectations, beliefs, and concepts has resulted in a number of consequences for the reception of his philosophy of mysticism. Some readers interpret it as being incompatible with mystical experiences that fall outside the traditional religious context, and even provide ‘evidence’ – also textually based – that mystical experience in general has a common phenomenal structure.¹⁷ It is here legitimate to ask whether or not Katz tends to reject the ‘evidence’ of these textual reports while accepting those that confirm his own position.¹⁸ Other critics, such as Robert Forman, challenge Katz’s understanding on methodological grounds and question the accuracy of the premises that have led to his point of view. In several essays,¹⁹ Forman argues that there are indeed such things as ‘pure consciousness events’ – events that are independent of any given religious tradition – and that, in certain

¹⁵ Katz 1983a, p. 21.

¹⁶ See “The conservative character of mystical experience” (1983)

¹⁷ This issue is discussed in chapter four.

¹⁸ Part of the answer involves the delimitation of the term ‘mystical’, which will be discussed in chapter three. Another relevant component in Katz’s position on this issue is Katz’s view on ‘facilitation’, which is discussed in chapter four. Katz’s views regarding ‘evidence’ play an important role as well, and these will be discussed in chapter five.

¹⁹ For example: *The problem of pure consciousness* (1990); *Mysticism, mind, and consciousness* (1999); and, “What does mysticism have to teach us about consciousness?” (1998). Some of Katz’s other critics are Michel Stoeber, “Constructivist epistemologies of mysticism; a critique and a revision” (1992) and Donald Evans, “Can philosophers limit what mystics can do? A critique of Steven Katz” (1989). For an overview of various criticisms as well as Katz’s responses, see Gregory 2006, pp 10-35.

respects, Katz's mistake is to think that mystical experience is like ordinary experience.²⁰ In Forman's reading, and in the reading of many others, Katz is seen as more of a constructivist than a "contextualist", with the unacceptable consequences of relativism, reductionism, and a view that is incompatible with the notion of an independent Reality having an impact on the mystic's experience.²¹

In his infrequent responses to such criticisms, Katz has basically denied all charges, claiming to have been more or less misunderstood. Thus at various times and in various papers he has asserted realist intentions and a belief in the cognitivity of mystical experience. Moreover, he has strongly rejected the notion that he is a 'constructivist' of the type defined by perennialists, and chooses the self-styled designation of "contextualist" instead.²² Indeed Katz counters the arguments of these critics by charging that it is actually the perennialists that are guilty of reducing the mystical to events in consciousness and devaluing the role of "Reality" in the experience.

In his dissertation, *Steven T. Katz's Philosophy of Mysticism* (2006), William P. Gregory builds a similar defence of Katz's contextualism based on the fact that he has been wrongfully judged and labelled in certain fundamental respects, although Gregory does admit that this has been partly the result of Katz's own 'lack of clarity' and 'failure to communicate':

The impasse that has stood between him and his many critics can, in large part, be traced to this lack of clarity. Yet it also follows from failure of communication: Katz has hardly given a substantive response to his

²⁰ See for instance Forman 1993 and Forman 1999 (p.53).

²¹ In Stoeber 1992 for instance (p. 108), Stoeber criticises constructivism in general, and not merely Katz's specific approach; his criticism mainly concerns John Hick's over-emphasis on "the role of the socio-religious categories of the mystic."

²² The label "constructivist" is firmly rejected by Katz in "Mystical speech and mystical meaning" (Katz 1992, p. 34, note 9): "I have been, of late, referred to as a 'constructivist,' but given the meaning attached to this designation by my critics, I reject this term, preferring to describe my approach as 'contextualist.' The most extensive use of the term 'Katzian constructivism' will be found in Foreman [sic], ed., *Problem of pure consciousness*." Katz's realist intentions are most clearly formulated in his reply to my questions (see section 2.2.) and in Gregory's thesis (Gregory 2006).

critics. Over the last twenty years, he has authored only a handful of pages in reply to various commentators.

In reaction, Forman and others have interpreted this lack of engagement in a number of ways, suggesting, perhaps, that he is unwilling to engage them, that he is locked in ideology and thus dismissive of contrary views, or that power dynamics in the academy are at play. I believe none of these are the case. Rather, it seems to me that Katz has other priorities. In the study of mysticism, his goal has been a complete dismantlement of perennialism and the establishment of a fully explicated contextualist alternative, and this is a task at which he is still at work.²³

Parallel to our discussion regarding Katz's perspective and its contribution to the interpretation of mystical reports, we will consider the degree to which "misunderstanding" may have contributed to the various criticisms of his approach. The aim in this regard is to assist in the analysis and untangling of these misunderstandings, not to point the investigation in a specific evaluative direction.

The fundamental contradiction in Katz's position is that on the one hand he insists that the character of a given mystical experience is more or less wholly determined by the pre-experiential conditioning or context of the mystic, while on the other he insists that contact with an independent Reality is also somehow involved. One of the more unusual outcomes of this line of reasoning, and perhaps one of the primary causes of the criticisms levelled against him, is that textual accounts of mystical experiences appear to be influenced more by pre-experiential conditioning than by the experiences themselves. Another area of tension in Katz's stance is that he denies the possibility of a 'pure' (unmediated) experience, which Katz associates with 'givenness', yet seems to affirm the primacy or 'givenness' of texts. One effect of this tension is that it inclines Katz towards a more literal interpretation of mystical reports in which his own role as 'interpreter' is never problematized.

For purposes of analysis, we have organized the above identified problems into three groups or complexes, each of which will be sequentially discussed in chapters three, four and five. These three problem-groups can be summarized as follows:

²³ Gregory 2006, p. 292.

- (1) The epistemological and other problems that surround and/or emerge out of Katz's plea for the recognition of differences in mystical experience and his denial of a common core that unites the experiences of diverse mystics.
- (2) Those problems that arise out of Katz's understanding of the facilitation and pre-experiential conditioning of mystical experience.
- (3) Those problems that relate to Katz's insistence that although mystical experiences are largely determined by pre-experiential religious conditioning and thus of a conservative character, contact with a Reality that transcends that conditioning is also somehow involved.

Before beginning our investigation, however, the remaining sections of this chapter will examine the methodological problems entailed in the analysis of Katz's position (section 1.2), the basic interpretational framework that will guide our analysis (section 1.3), and Katz's position vis-à-vis the delimitation of mysticism and religion (section 1.4). Regarding chapter two, it largely consists of a concise, straightforward presentation of the points made by Katz in his original 1978 article – the one that has stirred up all the epistemological, exegetical and philosophical dust. Chapter two closes with the presentation of a personal email exchange with Katz in which a series of questions were posed and answered with regard to the issues outlined above.

1.2. Methodological problems

Before initiating the project of clarifying Katz's position on the one hand, and evaluating its interpretive value on the other, it is necessary to consider the connection between our aim and our method, as well as the problematic relation of these to our object of investigation.

To systematically analyse a given theory, one requires a set of criteria against which that theory can be evaluated. However, with regard to what those criteria should be, no scholarly consensus has been reached,

even with respect to a standard that would be minimally applicable to *all* theories in *all* contexts and for *all* purposes.²⁴

The four evaluative criteria to be shortly presented in *subsection 1.2.1* are not held to be applicable either to all types of theories or to all of the problems that a theory might aim to solve. These criteria have been specifically designed with Katz's theory of textual interpretation in mind. Moreover, they have been designed to coincide with what are thought to be Katz's own requirements for a scientific theory, largely gleaned from the conclusion to his 1978 article, "Language, Epistemology and Mysticism":

...our position is able to accommodate *all* the evidence which is accounted for by non-pluralistic accounts without being reductionistic, i. e. it is able to do more justice to the specificity of the evidence and its inherent distinctions and disjunctions than can the alternative approaches. That is to say, our account neither (a) overlooks any evidence, nor (b) has any need to simplify the available evidence to make it fit into comparative or comparable categories, nor (c) does it begin with a priori assumptions about the nature of ultimate reality.²⁵

It is points (a), (b) and (c) above that have served as guidelines in the formulation of the criteria by which we will attempt an evaluation of Katz's contextual approach. Further insight as to his position on these matters has come from his initial letter of invitation to the symposium, published under the name *Mysticism and philosophical analysis*:

The aim of the collection is to investigate various aspects of the subject [of mysticism] from a sensitive yet rigorous philosophical perspective. The object is to try to advance the discussion and analysis of the subject beyond James and Otto, Stace and Zaehner. We would like to have essays which investigate and clarify basic aspects of the subject so that we can move beyond the position which is philosophically unsophisticated and fails to distinguish between various types of mystical experience on the one hand and the logic and language of different types of mystical claims

²⁴ See, for instance, Robert E. Mason's "Grounds of acceptable theory in education" (in *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, vol. 1, no. 2, January 1961, Springer Netherlands). Mason discusses the discrepancy between a theory's grounds for acceptability in a scientific community and its practical application (or acceptance) in the relevant community.

²⁵ Katz 1978a, p. 66.

on the other. Alternatively, we want to avoid the extremes of positivist-like rejections of such experience as ‘nonsense’ as well as the position which rejects logic, criteria, and analyses on the dubious ground that they are out of place in the discussion of mysticism.²⁶

The following subsection introduces these evaluative criteria and offers a brief explication of each.

1.2.1. *Evaluative Criteria*

The four evaluative criteria to be applied in our assessment of Katz’s contextual understanding of mystical experience are as follows:

- 1) Any theory that purports to be a theory of mystical experience must be capable of precisely identifying and demarcating the phenomena it aims to interpret and/or explain. In other words, it must *establish precise demarcation standards*.
- 2) Any theory that purports to be a theory of mystical experience must rest upon on a coherent theoretical foundation without intrinsic contradictions. In other words, it must exhibit *theoretical consistency*.²⁷
- 3) Any theory that chooses the ‘*subjective experiences*’ of certain mystics as its ‘*object*’ of study must avoid the tendency to interpret those experiences in ways that fundamentally distorts or disregards the self-understanding of those mystics. In other words, it must *show regard for the validity of self-understanding*.²⁸
- 4) Any theory that purports to be a theory of mystical experience must be capable of advancing current understandings relative to

²⁶ Katz 1978, p. 3.

²⁷ In Popper’s formulation, in order for a proposition to be considered scientific it must be both falsifiable and testable. If a theory has no coherent theoretical foundation, if it is fraught with logical inconsistencies, it can be neither verified nor falsified.

²⁸ In Wolff (1997, p. 577), following a suggestion made by Wilfred Smith (1971), the author offers the following definition of a ‘validating criterion’ that is similar to our own: “the capacity of an individual’s interpretation to be ‘existentially appropriated’ by those to whom it applies.” On a more personal note, I want to mention that I try to adhere to this particular *evaluative criterion* myself. Thus in the course of analysing Katz’s contextual approach I intend to be sensitive to his own sense of self-understanding.

the phenomenon under investigation. In other words, it must *extend the understanding of the field*.

Establishing Precise Demarcation Standards

Simply put, the establishment of precise demarcation standards means to set down those characteristics by which one intends to distinguish one phenomenon from another. To fulfil his aim of advancing the discourse on mystical experience beyond the understandings of such figures as James, Otto, Stace and Zaehner, Katz's approach would have to do more than merely identify the salient features of such experiences, as these individuals have already attempted to do. To begin with, it would have to be sophisticated enough to draw a clear line of distinction between mystical and non-mystical experience. Without this preliminary act of demarcation, it would seem exceedingly difficult to distinguish between different types of mystical experiences and the logic and language of different types of mystical claims.²⁹ Thus the establishment of precise demarcating criteria would seem a necessary step in the development of any 'philosophically rigorous' theory of mysticism.³⁰ Let us look into this matter in a bit more detail.

²⁹ Stace, among others, has identified a number of phenomenal characteristics to aid in distinguishing between mystical and ordinary experience. Over time, these criteria have been developed to distinguish mystical experience from psychotic episodes, dream states, hallucinations and other types of phenomenally categorized experiences. Ralph W. Hood who has developed recognitional criteria from Stace's categories even distinguishes between mystical and religious experience (we discuss this in section 1.4). One problem that will be discussed at several points in this thesis concerns the fact that, as of yet, Katz has not replaced Stace's criteria with any other; nor has he addressed, in any of his writings on mysticism, the question of how such an alternative set of criteria might be developed.

³⁰ The discussion concerning demarcation criteria in Karl Poppers philosophy of science mainly concerns the demarcation of scientific investigation relative to other areas of theory-making – such as religion, for instance. (This can be compared to the logical-positivist view that science is demarcated from religion by its empirical foundation, and stands in stark contrast to it.) The aim of this investigation is not to develop demarcation criteria for how scientific inquiry *should* be undertaken; nor is it to demarcate science from other areas of human activity on a metatheoretical level. In terms of this dissertation, the term 'demarcation' relates to the clear identification – largely through definition – of the phenomena that are being interpreted or investigated.

Every scholarly investigation, regardless of the methodology employed, must have an object of investigation, whether that object is a theoretical entity (such as a philosophical problem) or a particular phenomenon of interest. In the case of mystical experience, Katz's area of interest, one must be skilled enough to ascertain which experiences qualify as mystical, who the mystics are, and which of the many textual samples are relevant for a theory of mysticism. This is because the outcome of the investigation and the conclusions derived therefrom are highly dependent upon the initial body of evidence that one selects as the object of study.

If, for instance, one sets about to interpret the complete works of Franz Kafka, one begins the task with an empirically demarcated object of interpretation: it is limited in time and through publicly displayed instantiations; and it is a body of texts that can be interpreted in a variety of ways by various types of interpreters. If, on the other hand, one wants to interpret the complete published works of 'mystics', the task of identifying the relevant texts would run into considerable difficulty unless one is able to ascertain *who* the 'mystics' are.

The creation of a theoretical framework is not required in order to identify Kafka or his writings (unless a dispute arises regarding the authorship of a particular text). This, however, cannot be said when it comes to the identification of 'mystics and their writings'. Indeed, a persuasive case could be made for including even Kafka among this group. One's identification of 'mystics and their writings' thus depends upon the criteria selected to identify experiences that are, or may be called, mystical; the same would be true in identification of mystical experience reports.

Of course, this is not to say that each individual who has an experience that meets the standards of a mystical experience is a mystic. On the other hand, there would appear to be a necessary connection between an individual identified as a mystic and an experience identified as mystical – the experiential dimension. Sustaining a prolonged and intense interest in mystical phenomena might make one a mysticism expert, but that alone does not make one a mystic; the experiential dimension is required. Thus whether it is actively sought or simply occurs, the *'mystical' experience*

appears to be a necessary condition for the identification of both mystics and mystical experience reports. As such, the list of identifying criteria should be able to specify those aspects of *experience* that qualify as *mystical*.

A principal question asked in this thesis concerns the standards employed by Katz for the identification of those mystics and mystical experience reports he has selected for study. This is important because it is the *literary output of mystics* that Katz relies upon as ‘evidence’ for his various claims – especially those related to the fact that pre-experiential conditioning is almost entirely determinative of the actual experience of the mystic. As such, the finding of poor, limited or imprecise standards of demarcation would certainly represent a significant weakness in Katz’s approach. As an example of how this might work, take the case of Robert Forman, who claims to have freed himself from the shackles of pre-experiential conditioning in order to have had at least one “pure consciousness event”.³¹ Should his report of a mystical experience be taken less seriously than those that are more religiously-based? Should his mystical experience report be included or excluded as significant data in the study of mysticism? And if a given approach to the interpretation of mystical experience reports does exclude experiences such as Forman’s from the class of ‘mystical experiences’ (as does Katz’s) can one legitimately claim (as does Katz) that no relevant evidence has been overlooked?³²

Theoretical Consistency

Unless a given approach exhibits theoretical consistency – i.e., unless it resolves any and all intrinsic contradictions – it will be unable to precisely identify and demarcate the phenomena it aims to interpret and/or explain. The fundamental criteria for a scientific theory in the Popperian paradigm are its falsifiability and testability; if a theory contains logical inconsistencies and has no coherent theoretical foundation it can be neither verified nor falsified. Moreover, if the

³¹ See Forman’s *Mysticism, mind and consciousness* (1999) for instance.

³² Whether Forman and Katz refer to the ‘same’ type of experience in addressing ‘pure experience’ and ‘PCE’ will be discussed in section 1.3, where we discuss different conceptualizations of ‘pure experience’ and also what it means to say that one thing is ‘the same as’ or ‘similar to’ another.

differentiation of phenomena is one of the aims of a theory, it must be assumed that unless it is consistent and coherent it will not succeed in properly establishing precise demarcation standards (the first of our evaluative criteria).

A prime example of inconsistency in Katz's theoretical approach, and one that will be treated in depth and from various angles throughout this thesis, involves the dual assertion that the character of a given mystical experience is almost wholly determined by the mystic's pre-experiential conditioning and partially shaped by the mystic's encounter with an independent Reality: the problem of Katz's contextualism vs. his realism (twice mentioned above). Other examples of potential inconsistency involve the countervailing impact on important aspects of Katz's theory of his assertion that one cannot distinguish between experience and interpretation, and also to a certain extent the incompatibility of his assertion that there are no pure experiences with his view concerning the role of 'models' in mystical traditions.

Although it does not fall precisely in the category of an inconsistency, and is not examined at length in this thesis, another problem bears mentioning here as well. It is the problem of the means that Katz employs to confirm his primary theoretical claim; what might be termed the problem of "model verification". Stated simply, it involves the fact that the basic evidence presented by Katz in support of his understanding consists of the textual reports of mystics regarding their experiences. From these he draws the general conclusion that the various mystical experiences he has studied are not *similar* but *different* in character.³³ Katz refers to this textual evidence as 'empirical' and employs it to establish that his contextual interpretation is superior to that of the perennialists in terms of its ability to understand and distinguish between mystical experiences. The question is whether or not it is justifiable for one to describe a selection of textual material as

³³ Also for discerning 'same' and 'different' phenomena one must have a clear idea of the given phenomenon that is to be discerned from, or assimilated to, another given phenomenon. The notions of 'sameness' and 'difference', and their not entirely presuppositionless character, will be discussed in section 1.3.6. The argument for 'sameness' and 'difference' in experiences based on the 'evidence' will be taken up in chapter two, where we look at the content of Katz's article from 1978.

‘empirical evidence’ and then attempt to use one’s interpretation of that selected material to ‘prove’ or ‘establish’ the correctness of one’s interpretive approach.³⁴ As noted by Nelson Pike in his supplementary study, “Steven Katz on Christian mysticism”.³⁵

Katz claims to have ‘demonstrated’ the truth of his construction theory of mystical experience by reference to something he refers to as ‘the empirical evidence.’ And in so far as I have been able to follow the thread of the reasoning, the ‘demonstration’ in question has the form of an argument that begins with the description of a fact and proceeds to its conclusion via a Kantian-like abductive inference, that is, via the contention that the circumstance mentioned in the conclusion is the only (or at least the best) explanation of the fact described at the outset.

Showing regard for the Validity of Self-understanding

Maintaining respect for the validity of self-understanding is important to ensure that in the interpretation of a mystical experience, the subjects of study as well as the linguistic expressions they use are not left out of the equation. By this is meant that even when texts have been written by persons who can no longer correct or explain potential misreadings and/or misunderstandings, their linguistic expressions should not be interpreted in distorted ways that would, for instance, exclude them from being considered in the discussion of mysticism and mystical experience. Something of this sort, for example, might be taking place in the misunderstandings between Katz and Forman: on the one hand, Forman claims to have experienced a PCE, a pure consciousness event; on the other hand, Katz might decide not to include Forman’s report as legitimate data, since, in his view, there is no such thing as a pure

³⁴ Katz refers to ‘the evidence’ in several contexts. However, as noted above, there is a problem with using ‘evidence’ to prove that one’s interpretation of that same ‘evidence’ is correct – a problem that he seems to disregard in the conclusion to his 1978: “A strong supporting element in favour of our pluralistic account is found in the fact that our position is able to accommodate *all* the evidence which is accounted for by non-pluralistic accounts without being reductionistic, i.e. it is able to do more justice to the specificity of the evidence and its inherent distinctions and disjunctions than can the alternative approaches” (Katz 1978a, p. 66). In Anders Jeffner’s criteria one finds an additional requirement for a definition of religious sentences: “Nothing must be introduced in the definiens which anticipates the analysis” (Jeffner, 1972, p. 4).

³⁵ In *Mystic union* (1992, pp.194-207) from a supplementary study called “Steven Katz on Christian mysticism” (Pike, 1992, p. 201).

(unmediated) experience. Katz's account might thus *a priori* exclude the type of phenomena that Forman claims to be a relevant part of mysticism research. Forman presents himself as a mystic and claims that the experiences he has had are genuinely mystical. If Katz rejects the validity of such claims, does he then fail to show regard for Forman's self-understanding? Is Katz willing to fairly entertain the notion that reports such as Forman's might represent legitimate data that throw his own understanding into question? These are the types of questions that will be broached in relation to this third evaluative criterion.

Extending the Understanding of the Field of Study

The fact that Katz takes up the study of mystical experience with a desire to 'advance' mysticism research is made clear in his introduction to the anthology in which his 1978 article appears. There it is asserted that "the object is to try to advance the discussion and analysis of the subject beyond James and Otto, Stace and Zaehner".³⁶ The question is whether or not Katz has succeeded in achieving this ambitious aim. And this question bears an important relation to the one regarding the establishment of precise demarcation standards. If in the identification of relevant mystical texts Katz has been too selective – including those that support and excluding those that contradict his contextual interpretive approach – this would certainly not be helpful in terms of extending the understanding of mystical experiences. Taking the example of Forman once again, one can see how such a difficulty might arise.

Katz, who is familiar with Forman's report of a 'pure consciousness experience', nonetheless seems to reject it as a textual source that potentially contradicts his central assumption that there is no such thing as a pure experience. This gives the impression that Katz is unable to entertain the possibility that reports such as Forman's can advance the discourse on mystical experience – perhaps even beyond his own contextual approach. It also calls into question Katz's assurance that he has "not overlooked any evidence", leading to a further impression that Katz's understanding of what a mystic is excludes individuals like Forman, and individuals that have non-religiously affiliated backgrounds.

³⁶ Katz 1978, p. 3.

In pursuing his own interpretive aims, Katz relies exclusively on the mystical reports of mystics embedded in one major religious tradition or another, and from these he draws the conclusion that mystics in general are conditioned by their traditional religious backgrounds. It would be interesting to know precisely why Forman's report is not considered adequate 'evidence' to the contrary. In what sense does Katz believe his theory to have extended the discourse if it excludes certain forms of mystical experience from being evidentially approved? On what grounds does Katz maintain that his contextual approach provides a more accurate understanding of mystical experience than do common core theories, and in what sense has he disproved the perennialist claim for cross-cultural similarities among mystical experiences? The answers to these and other such questions will be pursued in the course of this thesis.

In summary, the evaluative criteria to be employed in analysing the theoretical worthiness of Katz's contextual approach are here restated in the form of four questions: 1) Does Katz's theory establish precise demarcation standards; 2) Does it maintain theoretical consistency; 3) Does it show regard for the validity of self-understanding; and finally, 4) Does it extend our understanding of the phenomenon of mystical experience?

1.2.2. Misunderstanding Katz

In *Steven T. Katz's philosophy of mysticism*, William P. Gregory provides an extensive description of how Katz's critics have accounted for Katz's position. Gregory claims that most of the literature referring to Katz is of a critical nature and attempts to address these criticisms by posing the following question: "What precisely is the philosophical position Steven T. Katz intends to advance in the philosophy of mysticism?"³⁷ In answer, Gregory argues that Katz's critics have basically misunderstood his position, and that this in turn has shaped their critical interpretation of his writings:

Interlocutors have repeatedly judged his accounting of mystical experiences to be reductionistic, his epistemology idealist or solipsistic,

³⁷ Gregory 2006, p. 7. This is a question of ours also.

and his fundamental stance with respect to mystic's claims to objectively know transcendent referents agnostic if not sceptical.³⁸

As an example of a critic who has interpreted Katz's theory of mysticism as reductive and incapable of accounting for a number of relevant phenomena, one can quote Michael Stoeber:

In overemphasising the role of the socio-religious categories of the mystic, constructivist epistemologies are not compatible with the view that a reality impacts upon the mystic in any creative and original way. It will become clear that as a consequence of this over-emphasis of pre-experiential categories, constructivism can not adequately explain significant phenomena associated with mystical experience, namely, mystic heresy on the one hand and the similarities of mystical experience between different traditions on the other.³⁹

Whether or not Stoeber and others are correct in doubting Katz's self-described contextualism,⁴⁰ one thing is certain: if it is true that by "overemphasising the role of the socio-religious categories of the mystic" Katz abandons the possibility of accounting for "reality's impact upon the mystic in a creative and original way",⁴¹ his theory would lack theoretical consistency, despite his attempt to incorporate both propositions in his thought. Even if one were to grant the intuitive basis of Katz's decision to admit the role of Reality in a mystical experience, this admission cannot be at the cost of the overall theoretical consistency of his approach. Otherwise, almost any proposition can be true and the theory can say nothing of genuine value about mystical experience – i.e., it cannot extend the understanding of the field. Moreover, it appears that Katz's approach to the problems of mystic heresy and cross-traditional similarities is to basically explain them away by claiming that the former

³⁸ Gregory 2006, p. 6. Since Gregory has made an excellent job of gathering the critical evaluations of Katz's theory, many of the critical accounts will be referenced by way of him.

³⁹ Stoeber 1992, p. 108. Even though Stoeber is here primarily referring to John Hick's constructivism, he includes Katz's theory in this methodological category, and introduces the problem of constructivism (first page of his paper) with reference to Katz's theory.

⁴⁰ Katz 1992a, p. 34, note 9

⁴¹ Stoeber 1992, p. 108.

largely exist in the minds of perennial interpreters and the latter do not exist at all.⁴²

On a first reading, the above criticisms of Katz's contextual approach appear more or less reasonable. In addition, Katz appears to display little sensitivity to either the reality-claims of mystics or to the claimed cognitive character of mysticism. In an effort to further clarify these issues, I made direct email contact with Katz with the aim of posing a few relevant questions.⁴³ These questions along with Katz's answers appear in chapter two, directly after the analysis of Katz's 1978 article. Because his answers leave matters largely unresolved, the analysis of his position must rely upon available material. Out of regard for the validity of Katz's own self-understanding, however, the aim will be to follow Katz's argumentation without attaching labels or making precipitous assumptions. In other words, if Katz claims that his theoretical approach is 'contextual', we take him at his word; and if he claims his epistemological approach to be that of a 'realist', we accept that as well. However, we do reserve the right to inquire as to precisely what all this means, and what its implications are for the interpretation of mystical reports.

1.2.3. The problem of method

A major question regarding interpretation concerns the degree to which the interpreter's own preconceptions and interpretive pattern affect her interpretation. By "*interpretive pattern*" we mean:

⁴² See "The conservative character of mystical experience" (1983), where Katz explains that it is not his intention to claim that mystical experience is only conservative in character, though he wants to examine this characteristic to balance the overemphasised 'heretic' characterization. Moreover, in "Ethics and mysticism in eastern mystical traditions" (1992), Katz completely rejects the characterization of mystics as "rebels and heretics, antinomians and spiritual revolutionaries" and characterizes this view as a "misapprehension" that "needs revision" (Katz 1992b, p. 253).

⁴³ These questions and Katz's answers are presented in section 2.2 structured as questions and answers. However, they are also presented in an appendix in their original format.

Interpretive Pattern: *The cognitive foundation that is systematically employed by a person at a given point in time in order to understand a given sentence or phenomenon of experience.*

Preconceptions as to what is ultimately real or true (or unreal and false) must necessarily be part of the interpretive pattern of any given person who takes the role of interpreter.⁴⁴ Here we do not mean to imply that one's interpretive pattern is something 'static'; in a personal system one's cognitive foundation can be in a constant flux, with the acquirement of new elements and the rejection of others. Thus between one time period and another, a person's interpretive pattern may undergo such profound change that, even in family-resemblance terms, it would be difficult to equate the former with the latter. The interpretive patterns presented by science are generally somewhat more 'rigid' in that they contain basic theorems formed as rules (or other law-like modes of expression) that make them axiomatic and logically interconnected. As such they are much more difficult to overthrow, change or contradict. Not that there is any absolute value in overthrowing rules, axioms or theorems. However, if they exclude certain phenomena, certain other 'rules', or

⁴⁴ My use of the term interpretive pattern is similar to the use of cognitive scientists of the term 'cognitive structure': "a persistent, significant class of patterns of organization of knowledge components" ([www.agiri.org/wiki/index.php?title=Category:Cognitive Structure](http://www.agiri.org/wiki/index.php?title=Category:Cognitive_Structure)). Batson et al (1993) describe the functions and implications of 'cognitive structures' (pp. 90-93). A popular discussion of basic components of interpretive patterns can be found in Sander 2000. Peter Winch uses the description "the rule according to which judgements of identity are made" (Winch 1958) to which I shall return in short. Also, an interesting discussion on the functions of a 'cognitive schema' can be found in McIntosh 1995.

Other terms employed in the philosophical literature are Frank Smith's "the theory of the world in the head" and Hjalmar Sundén's 'role' in his role theory. The 'interpretive patterns' serve to give meaning to what otherwise would amount to a number of unrelated events and experiences (which in William James terms is the 'bloom of confusion'). The compatibility of and translatability between various interpretive patterns is widely debated (see for instance Donald Davidson's critique that the notion of 'cognitive structure' is a dogma of empiricism). On the issue of 'truth' and interpretive patterns, we have to note though that any comparison between interpretive patterns that seem to contradict each other must primarily rest on an understanding of the interpretive patterns to be compared. This means that even though both agreement and disagreement presuppose a foundational understanding, it is not necessarily so that one must agree with an interpretive pattern as soon as it is understood.

even ‘interpretative patterns’ that disturb the ‘order’ of the original system or contradict its basic rules and theorems (‘anomalies’ in Kuhn’s terms, ‘heresies’ in social science’s), this is bound to lead to conflict. Heresy and anomaly must be ‘explained away’ or rejected so that the identity of the original interpretive pattern is preserved.

In terms of the above description, Katz’s theory of interpretation can be viewed as a particular interpretive pattern through which we are invited to interpret mystical phenomena and mystical language. First of all, however, Katz must deal with the problem of demarcation and provide a precise account of what the phrases ‘mystical phenomena’ and ‘mystical language’ are meant to denote. Without this we will be unable to identify the objects to which the rule-system applies. Anthropologist Peter Winch states it succinctly when he says:

A regularity or uniformity is the constant recurrence of the same kind of event on the same kind of occasion; hence statements of uniformities presuppose judgements of identity. But this takes us to an argument, according to which criteria of identity are necessarily relative to some rule: with the corollary that two events which count as qualitatively similar from the point of view of one rule would count as different from the point of view of another. So to investigate the type of regularity studied in a given kind of inquiry is to examine the nature of *the rule according to which judgments of identity are made in that enquiry*.⁴⁵

The rule-system employed by Katz to identify the mystics of his study seems incommensurable with that of the perennialists (his self-described opponents).⁴⁶ Whether or not this incommensurability also applies to the ‘mystics’ themselves is a question of delimitation that will be discussed below. Katz’s class of ‘mystics’ and ‘mystical experiences’ do not seem compatible with the class of ‘mystics’ and ‘mystical experiences’ studied by the perennialist interpreters. This apparent incompatibility calls for an examination of “the nature of the rule according to which judgements of identity are made” in Katz’s philosophy of mysticism.

⁴⁵ Winch 1958, p. 1.

⁴⁶ The meanings we ascribe to the terms ‘incommensurable’ and ‘paradigm’ come from Thomas Kuhn’s philosophy as well as from philosophers that criticize the notion of incommensurability, such as Feuerabend, Quine and Davidson. Their discussions on the existence of differing paradigms, and the degree to which translatability is possible, are both interesting and valuable.

Katz begins by more or less rejecting the approach – the particular paradigmatic character – of the perennial investigation of mysticism, and suggests a ‘paradigm shift’ to his ‘contextual’ approach instead. This shift involves the establishment of new rules of identification concerning who is and who is not considered to be a mystical personality. These rules leave some (like Robert Forman) on the borderline and perhaps others entirely out.

As the ‘orientalism debate’ has shown, it is not very helpful to study certain phenomena if the interpretive pattern of the interpreter severely distorts the interpretive pattern of the subjects that are being studied.⁴⁷ This is because such an approach invariably ends in portraying the given phenomenon as something it is not, thus contributing to ignorance instead of proper explanation, knowledge and genuine understanding. The following subsection provides an example of how the supposedly same phenomenon or set of behaviours can be identified and/or interpreted in three very different ways.

1.2.4. An example of three interpretive patterns

Because it would be inappropriate in the context of this thesis to make an exhaustive analysis of a given interpretive pattern, what follows is a general comparison of three different perspectives regarding the ingestion of peyote: 1) that of a Native American; 2) that of a Western psychiatrist; and, 3) that of a seventeenth century Jesuit missionary. By highlighting the central features of the interpretive pattern of each of these perspectives, it is hoped that the different models through which what is alleged to be the same act is interpreted will be revealed.

From a traditional Native American perspective, the act of ingesting peyote is comparable to the sacramental use of the Eucharist:

⁴⁷ See Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978), where Said criticises the West’s understanding of Arab culture as well as the construction of an ‘oriental’ identity. Further relevant discussions can be found in Richard King’s *Orientalism and religion*, Routledge 1999; Alexander Macfie’s *Orientalism*, Longman 2000; John MacKenzie’s *Orientalism – history, theory and the arts*, Manchester University Press 1995.

Peyote itself is regarded as a *sacramental substance* that has divine powers. It is often called ‘medicine,’ and it is believed to have *powerful healing ability*.⁴⁸

A well-known anthropological description of this activity is: “eating the flesh of the Gods”.⁴⁹ Apart from this, members of the Native American Church described the use of peyote as follows:

Ancient Spiritual tenets are to heal the body and spirit. Further, to teach impeccability, correct ‘seeing’ and power of Beingness. Peyote is not used to obtain ‘visions’ but to *open portals to Reality*. Always seeking centeredness within this existence. Peyote is *the road back to the true Self*. This should suffice in order to allow personal comprehension of this Sacrament.⁵⁰

A salient feature of this interpretive pattern is that it reflects a view that integrates both religion and medicine – a perspective extremely alien to the modern secular West.

This Native American interpretive pattern will now be contrasted with that of the Western psychiatrist (who is informed by a medical interpretive pattern) and the seventeenth century Jesuit (who perspective is informed by a Catholic interpretive pattern).

For a Western psychiatrist, actions such as ingesting peyote are usually characterized as “ingesting psychoactive substances”. According to the Western Psychiatric Associations’ *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (DMS-IV),⁵¹ the ingestion of peyote is associated with hallucinatory states that imply a number of psychopathological effects. The official diagnosis is termed “Hallucinogen dependency”; and the term ‘hallucinogen’ is explained as follows:

⁴⁸ This is quoted from a text by Timothy Miller of Kansas University and refers to how the Native American Church describes its use of peyote. It can be found at the website, <http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/nrms/nachurch.htm>. (Italics are my own.) The American Indian Religious Freedom Act on Peyote law begins with the following statement: “The use of ‘sacrament’ is contained within the community. Any other use of this would not be a correct use of the ‘medicine’.” (The italics are my own.)

⁴⁹ See for instance *Flesh of the gods – the ritual use of hallucinogens*, an anthology edited by Peter T. Furst (1972), where the perspective of Native Americans is highlighted in several articles on the ritual use of various ‘hallucinogenic’ substances.

⁵⁰ Quoted from the “Statement for Understanding” found in the American Indian Religious Freedom Act at the website, www.nativeamericanchurch.com (Italics are my own.)

⁵¹ Western Psychiatric Associations (Europe and North America).

What is a hallucinogen? Hallucinogens are drugs that cause *distortions in a user's perceptions of reality*. Users often see images, hear sounds, and feel *sensations that seem real but do not exist*. Some hallucinogens produce rapid, intense mood swings. The most common hallucinogens are LSD, PMA, 2 C-B, *peyote*, and certain varieties of mushrooms.⁵²

In this psychiatric interpretive pattern there is not even a hint of context-sensitivity to the effects of hallucinogenic substances like peyote, although some – like LSD-25 – have been used within therapeutic contexts as ‘healing devices’.⁵³ This fact, however, does nothing to change the modern professional milieu in which DSM-IV sets the standard model of interpretation, and in which there is no account of ‘healing properties’ at all.⁵⁴

Now imagine the interpretive pattern of a seventeenth century Jesuit missionary in the New World as he observes the ‘heathens’ ingesting peyote. Fortunately, Richard Evans Schultes and Albert Hoffman’s detailed account of such an encounter has made the exercise unnecessary. What follows is a quote that captures the essence of their finding:⁵⁵

Several seventeenth-century Spanish Jesuits testified that the Mexican Indians used Peyote medicinally and ceremonially for many ills and that

⁵² Quoted from: <http://www.savvyce.com/DSM.asp> (Italics are my own) This description (or definition) of a hallucination is slightly misleading since, surely, even a psychiatrist would consider the *sensations* to be ‘real’, though perhaps the experiencers inference about the causal factor that has influenced the sensation might be mistaken in various ways.

⁵³ See, for instance, Snelders/Kaplan, 2002 for a review on the use of hallucinogenic substances within medical practice. Transpersonal psychotherapist Stanislav Grof has also authored a number of books related to the subject. See, for instance, his *LSD Psychotherapy – Exploring the frontiers of the hidden mind* (Hunter House 1980).

⁵⁴ See also Lukoff, 1985, where he proposes various means for differentiating between positive and negative ‘psychotic’ experiences: “current psychiatric practice does not attempt to distinguish between psychotic episodes with growth-potential and those which indicate a mental disorder”. See also anthropologist Michael Winkelman’s article, “Therapeutical effects of hallucinogens”, published in *Anthropology of Consciousness* (1991, vol 2, no. 3-4).

⁵⁵ For an introduction to the missionaries’ treatment of the Native American (Indian) population with respect to their ritual activities, see for instance Richard Evans Schultes and Albert Hoffman’s *Plants of the Gods – their sacred, healing and hallucinogenic powers* (Healing Arts Press, 1992).

when intoxicated with the cactus they saw “horrible visions”. Padre Andréa Pérez de Ribas, a seventeenth-century Jesuit who spent sixteen years in Sinaloa, reported that peyote was usually drunk but that its use, even medicinally, was *forbidden and punished*, since it was connected with “*heathen rituals and superstitions*” to *contact evil spirits* through “*diabolic fantasies*”.⁵⁶

Note that terms such as ‘evil spirits’, ‘diabolic fantasies’, ‘heathen rituals’ and the like appear in this testimonial as normative interpretative features of the ritual use of peyote, despite the contextual awareness displayed by rejecting its medicinal value and possible good effects.

The problem with viewing these interpretations as ‘*aspects*’ of a ‘*single truth*’ about the ingestion of Peyote is that they are incompatible in certain respects. The interpretive pattern of the psychiatrist excludes the possibility that peyote visions are in any sense ‘real’, whereas the interpretive pattern of the Native American suggests that those visions provide an opening of the ‘portals of reality’.⁵⁷ For the psychiatrist, the ingestion of peyote distorts reality and makes one experience things that ‘seem real but do not exist’; but for the Native American, peyote ingestion allows one to experience reality as it really is. Moreover, the Native American’s account of peyote’s ‘healing properties’ remains unaccounted for in psychiatric interpretations of the same phenomenon.

Within the narrow framework of this example, there is thus far no problem with Katz’s suggestion that when interpreting experiences we should take the context of the interpreted into account. Doing this would grant the interpreted the right to be ‘sane’, ‘good’ or ‘functional’ within the context of his or her own existence. On the other hand, the *apparent* contextual sensitivity of the Jesuit in accepting that peyote ingestion induced ‘real visions’ did not seem to redeem the Native American’s behaviour in his eyes.

One might reasonably ask why, despite the Jesuit missionary’s apparent contextual sensitivity, terms like ‘diabolic’ and ‘evil’ keep cropping up in

⁵⁶ Schultes/Hoffman 1992, in chapter titled “The tracks of the little deer”, p. 2.

⁵⁷ The understanding that peyote is not used to obtain ‘visions’ per se, but rather to open the ‘portals of reality’ suggests that the aim of peyote ingestion is not necessarily the ‘visions’ – which may be an aspect of the experience, but not the desired one.

his explanation of peyote ingesting behaviour? An answer as good as any other might be that from the perspective of his interpretive pattern the only material objects that are able to contain the 'body of God' are the bread and wine of the Communion. If God can *only* appear via the bread and wine of the Communion, then it is axiomatic that God cannot appear via peyote. For the Jesuit missionary, "the road back to the true Self" is understood to be *only* Jesus and *absolutely* not Peyote.

If the Native American's use of the word 'sacrament' in relation to 'peyote' is seen as his attempt to 'translate' the actions into terms employed by the Jesuit, the attempt must be considered to have failed because the Jesuit's interpretive pattern admits no referential points for 'sacrament' other than bread and wine. The 'logic' or 'sense' of the notion 'sacrament' is the same for both the Native American and the Jesuit: it designates the partaking of divine 'flesh'. The references, however, differ. The Jesuit rigidly believes that if the Native American wishes to partake of divine truth he can do so *only* through the ingestion of the bread and wine of the Holy Communion. But how is he to explain this to the Native American? On the other hand, how is the Native American to explain to the Jesuit that, for him, the ingestion of bread and wine might make for an odd meal, but corresponds not in the least to the experience of divine communion he receives by ingesting peyote?

Turning once again to the differing interpretive patterns of the psychiatrist and the Native American, we find the same problem. The Native American attempts to explain to the psychiatrist that peyote is not used to obtain 'visions' but to 'open the portals of Reality' – and that what the psychiatrist considers an hallucination is in fact a true and genuine perception. Unfortunately the attempt is bound to fail because the psychiatrist has already 'explained' that ingesting peyote involves 'seeing things' that "*seem* real but do not exist". From the perspective of the psychiatrist's interpretive pattern, the Native American is merely involved in an act of self-deception that leads him to believe those 'things' to be *real*. And even if we were to grant the possibility of contextual sensitivity in the psychiatrist's interpretive pattern, the pathological implications embedded in the notion of 'reality-distortion' would prevent an interpretation of the Native American's peyote

‘visions’ that properly accounted for the Native American’s conviction as to the ‘healing potencies’ of the ‘medicine’ he is ingesting.⁵⁸

Nothing said thus far is meant to imply that a given person can have only *one* occurrent interpretive pattern. Moreover, any number of persons may share the same interpretive pattern concerning the same phenomenon. Interpretive patterns serve as classificatory systems for objects, so in this sense they are also systems of identification. In the above example, however, the Native American, the Psychiatrist and the Jesuit each interpreted the identified phenomenon of ingesting peyote differently. A parallel outcome can be seen in the duck/rabbit perception tests used in Gestalt-psychology, where the “same” data can be viewed according to two interpretive patterns, each interpreting the data in a way that is said to be incongruent with the other.⁵⁹ In the case of conflicting interpretive patterns within the larger system of one individual, it is up to that person to give primacy to one of these in order to interpret the phenomenon at hand. This giving of primacy is generally motivated by such considerations as relevance, authority, sentiment, rationality standards, and so on. Taking the duck-rabbit perception test as an example, one might say that it would be ‘rational’ to interpret the image as a picture of a duck if it appeared in the context of a picture of a pond filled with ducks. In general, however, rationality standards would only be one of many possible foundations for interpretation.

⁵⁸ This is a very complex issue, for as mentioned earlier ‘hallucinogens’ have been used in therapeutic contexts (see Snelders/Kaplan 2002). Moreover, the chemical properties and neurological effects of substances that modern medicine classifies as ‘hallucinogenic’ bear a marked chemical resemblance to the ‘mood stabilizers’ that are regularly prescribed by modern medical practitioners for therapeutic purposes. Upon the ingestion of mood stabilizers serotonin synthesis increases; this same result has been observed with regard to the ingestion of peyote (the psychoactive ingredient in peyote being ‘mescaline’). Additionally, manipulation of the serotonin level is considered the primary factor in bringing about the onset of hallucinatory states. Thus, at present, there can be no settled understanding concerning whether hallucinogens should be classified as therapeutic or pathological.

⁵⁹ See for instance Furberg/Andersson 1972, who problematized their pelican/antelope version of the duck/rabbit examination by comparing two interpreters, each of whom lack the interpretive pattern necessary to identify a pelican and an antelope respectively. In such cases, context sensitivity does not appear to make much difference.

It is important to note though, that there is a problem in determining whether two interpretive patterns are in disagreement (or agreement) concerning fundamental beliefs, or if the primary issue of understanding has not been solved. Initially, it seems to be a matter of disagreement if the Native American interpretive pattern includes the claim that peyote opens portals to reality and the Psychiatrist's interpretive pattern includes the claim that peyote distorts perception of reality. This disagreement though, presupposes that they are talking about the *same* phenomenon, but how is this (or how can we know if this is) the 'same' phenomenon if such diverse interpretations can be given to it? To Katz, different interpretations add up to different experiences (and also different phenomena of experience), which would imply that the Psychiatrist and the Native American are talking about different phenomena, in spite of their belief that they refer to the same event when disagreeing. Though if they are not talking about the same phenomenon, can we say that they disagree with each other or rather that some form of misunderstanding has taken place?

While agreement or disagreement both presuppose some form of understanding (at least that the 'same' phenomenon is referred to by both), understanding does not presuppose agreement. The issue though, is not to evaluate to what extent the Psychiatrist and the Native American agree or disagree with each other, but rather to have a means of measuring to what extent they understand each other. And it seems, as the example above indicates, that there are some problems of understanding which precede the problems of disagreement. These problems are apparently connected to the criteria by which both the Psychiatrist and the Native American make judgements of identity – i.e. their respective interpretive pattern. It seems that even if understanding does not presuppose agreement, there has to be some form of compatibility between the interpretive patterns in order to have something to agree about. And if two interpretive patterns are in conflict, it becomes impossible to make judgements of identity that denote the same phenomenon or experience, in which case agreement or disagreement cannot come into question. (The same problem arises in an incoherent interpretive pattern where for instance two conflicting ideas are held as equally true.)

What then must the Native American do to explain his actions to someone who has chosen to interpret what he is doing according to criteria that are in fundamental conflict with his own? One could argue that the Native American has made a sincere attempt to translate his actions so as to be understood in terms of the interpretive patterns of both the psychiatrist and the Jesuit. In other words, he has attempted to describe his practice in words that both the psychiatrist and the Jesuit can assimilate: words like 'medicine' to account for the 'healing' properties of peyote, and 'sacrament' to refer to the 'spiritual' element in its use. The Native American can also be seen as showing some form of understanding for the interpretive patterns of both the Psychiatrist and the Jesuit, despite the fact that his own interpretive pattern is incompatible with various elements of theirs. Nonetheless, the Native American still appears seriously unable to translate his actions such that they appear acceptable to the respective interpretive patterns of the Psychiatrist and the Jesuit.

What would the Psychiatrist and the Jesuit have to do in order to enhance the level of understanding between them and the Native American? By the same token, if we wanted to understand Katzian contextualism without succumbing to the above outlined problems and merely contradict a construction of Katz's theory which is not compatible with Katz's self-understanding, what would *we* have to do? And what would Katz have had to do in order to avoid the pitfalls of misunderstanding in his attempt to understand and theorize about mystics?

1.2.5. The phenomenological reduction

In our view, there is a possible answer to these questions: anyone that wishes to understand a given phenomenon must first set aside the specific *interpretive pattern* through which she intentionally or unintentionally apprehends it and eventually apprehend it from the self-understood perspective of the subject that is being studied.

Thinking of this in terms of the example discussed in the previous section, to understand the Huichol's ritual behaviour, both the psychiatrist and the Jesuit would need to set aside their own interpretive

patterns and enter into the natural context of that behaviour with as few preconceptions as possible. The setting aside of one's own *interpretive pattern* (at least partially and in important respects) seems to be a necessary precondition for eventually doing what anthropologists refer to as 'going native'. From our perspective, this means that the *interpretive pattern* of the interpreter must be replaced by the *interpretive pattern* of the subject being studied. In "The Idea of a Social Science" Peter Winch challenges J. S. Mill's view that "understanding a social institution consists in observing regularities in the behaviour of its participants and expressing these regularities in the form of generalizations".⁶⁰ Instead he proposes that in order to understand what is going on in an activity that is shared by a given social community (be it of a scientific or of a religious character), the researcher must – among other things – learn "the criteria according to which [that community] make[s] judgements of identity".⁶¹ In the following passage Winch explains that if Mill is right,

...the concepts and criteria according to which the sociologist judges that, in two situations the same thing has happened, or the same action preformed, must be understood *in relation to the rules governing sociological investigation*. But here we run against a difficulty; for whereas in the case of the natural scientist we have to deal with only one set of rules, namely those governing the scientist's investigation itself, here *what the sociologist is studying*, as well as his study of it, is a human activity and is therefore carried on according to rules. And it is these rules, rather than those which govern the sociologist's investigation, which specify what is to count as 'doing the same kind of thing' in relation to that kind of activity.⁶²

Winch continues by suggesting that "a historian or sociologist of religion must himself have some religious feeling if he is to make sense of the religious movement he is studying and understand the considerations which govern the lives of its participants"; likewise, "a historian of art must have some aesthetic sense if he is to understand the problems confronting the artists of his period; and without this he will have left out of his account precisely what would have made it a history of *art*, as opposed to a rather puzzling external account of certain motions which

⁶⁰ Winch, 1958, p. 3.

⁶¹ Winch, 1958, p. 2.

⁶² Winch, 1958, p. 3.

certain people have been perceived to go through”.⁶³ Thus if one wants to have some internal ‘sense’ of the *interpretive pattern* of the ‘other’ one is attempting to understand, one must be capable of temporarily setting aside one’s own potentially conflicting interpretive pattern. Winch does not express this in terms of what phenomenologists refer to as ‘phenomenological reduction’ – i.e., the ‘bracketing’ or temporary suspension of the metaphysical (and other) assumptions with which one approaches the world. Nonetheless, this sort of suspension of one’s assumptive framework seems to be a precondition for the type of situations that Winch uses to exemplify his point:

...a psychoanalyst may explain a patient’s neurotic behaviour in terms of factors unknown to the patient and of concepts which would be unintelligible to him. Let us suppose that the psychoanalyst’s explanation refers to events in the patient’s early childhood. Well, the description of those events will presuppose an understanding of the concepts in terms of which family life, for example, is carried on in our society; for these will have entered, however rudimentarily, into the relations between the child and his family. A psychoanalyst who wished to give an account of the aetiology of neuroses amongst, say, the Trobriand Islanders, could not just apply without further reflection the concepts developed by Freud for situations arising in our own society. He would have first to investigate such things as the idea of fatherhood amongst the islanders and take into account any relevant aspects in which their idea differed from that current in his own society.⁶⁴

Whether or not it is actually possible to suspend one’s own *interpretive pattern*, and to what extent one can do this and still understand the phenomenon in question, is a matter of great complexity that cannot be treated exhaustively here. It can be said, however, that it is a matter of the degree to which one is able to achieve an understanding of different

⁶³ Winch, 1958, pp. 4-5. It may not be that the one understanding a religious attitude must necessarily have some religious feeling of his own, that all depends on what type and level of understanding he tries to reach. The difference may sum up to the difference between being semantically informed on the state of alcohol intoxication and actually experiencing alcohol intoxication; a ‘root’ understanding of the phenomenon of alcohol intoxication may require that the interpreter is (or has on occasion been) actually intoxicated, while it must be admitted that even without personal experience of intoxication it is possible to understand a drunken state merely by having relevant information about such states.

⁶⁴ Winch, 1958, p. 5.

levels of meaning. This is because the degree to which one is able to set aside one's own judgments regarding a given 'object' directly affects one's ability to enter into the self-understanding of the subject under investigation. To determine whether or not it is possible to set aside one's own *interpretive pattern*, one would have to have some idea of the procedure that might be involved. In the remainder of this section we will attempt to explore this question, being guided by the phenomenological epistemology of Edmund Husserl.

If a philosopher, scientist or psychologist wants to adopt a phenomenological approach, the first requirement would be to temporarily suspend his or her metaphysical judgements about whether or not, and in what way, a so-called external or objective reality exists.⁶⁵ According to Husserl, this does not mean anything like *denying, rejecting or doubting* the existence of the natural world. It only means that "each judgement on spatio-temporal being is completely suspended".⁶⁶ Husserl explicates this idea as follows:

Thus *all sciences which relate to this natural world*, though they stand never so firm to me, though they fill me with wondering admiration, though I am far from any thought of objecting to them in the least degree, *I disconnect them all, I make absolutely no use of their standards, I do not appropriate a single one of the propositions that enter into their systems, even though their evidential value is perfect, I take none of them, no one of them serves me for a foundation* – so long, that is, as it is understood, in the way the sciences themselves understand it, as a truth *concerning the realities* of this world. *I may accept it only after I have placed it in the bracket.* That means: only in the modified consciousness of the judgement as it appears in disconnexion, and *not as it figures within the science as its proposition, a proposition which claims to be valid and whose validity I recognize and make use of.*⁶⁷

In analytical terms, we could describe this as an analysis of the truth-conditions (or meaning) of a sentence while its truth-value is bracketed. Seen from this perspective, if the exchange of exclamation marks for

⁶⁵ These ideas are extremely difficult to convey, but for now this will have to suffice as a working definition.

⁶⁶ My translation of "jedes Urteil über räumlich-zeitliches Dasein völlig verschliesst", in Husserl 1913, p. 56.

⁶⁷ Husserl, 1913, §32, translation by W. R. Boyce Gibson: *Ideas – general introduction to pure phenomenology*, George Allen and Unwin Humanities Press, 1976, p. 111.

question marks in every sentence is all we need do to suspend our existential judgements, it would appear not so difficult a task. Nevertheless, it is this very issue – the issue of whether or not it is possible to ‘set aside’ our existential judgements (even temporarily) – that appears to invite the controversy, and almost never the issue of whether or not it is possible to assume a new *interpretive pattern* (to learn “the criteria according to which [the subject of study] make[s] judgements of identity”⁶⁸).

Arguments as to why ‘setting aside’ is impossible have been presented in different ways. *If*, for instance, we were to assume the Freudian theory of consciousness, in which there are aspects of an individual’s *interpretive pattern* that are *unconscious*, that individual would be logically unable to ‘set aside’ those unconscious aspects because they are inaccessible. Another argument against the possibility of ‘setting aside’ is that if this were really done – if one were able to suspend all of one’s *interpretive pattern* – what would be left by which one could understand and/or interpret the phenomenon in question?

In a model of consciousness where consciousness is transparent to the interpreter and all presuppositions are potentially accessible with a certain amount of effort, the relevance of her interpretive pattern can be minimized in certain relevant respects, if not reduced to zero. This condition is met in the case of Edmund Husserl’s philosophy of consciousness, which will receive more detailed treatment in section 1.3. At this point, however, we will adopt Husserl’s method of ‘bracketing’, which, as we understand it, involves the suspension of judgement concerning the nature and quality of Ultimate Reality (or consciousness transcendent objects).

In practice, ‘bracketing’ simply means that the linguistic expressions that we interpret are interpreted on the basis of an ontologically neutral foundation. Although the particular ‘propositions’ of the *interpretive pattern* that the investigator aims to understand are labelled ‘true’, she must still account for them in a bracketed form – i.e., she has to understand them truth-conditionally. In other words, she interprets through the context of

⁶⁸ Winch, 1958, p. 2.

the interpreted. For instance, the sentence “Jesus lives” is interpreted as a truth-claim in the context of a Christian *interpretive pattern*, and the phenomenologist does not call this into question. The meaning of the sentence “Jesus lives” is understood truth-conditionally through the *interpretive pattern* that enables the sentence to be true.

Since the primary aim of this thesis is to understand and interpret the statements of Katz, this same method will be applied relative to his approach. On the other hand, since it *is* Katz’s contextual theory of mystical experience that is the object of our investigation, it is also our aim to examine whether or not his model of interpretation satisfies this as well as all the other *evaluative criteria* presented above.

The next subsection will examine Katz’s views regarding the phenomenological approach. The purpose is to uncover the problems involved in interpreting Katz through a phenomenological model of consciousness and experience.

1.2.6. *Katz and phenomenology*

After the procedure of ‘bracketing’ has been successfully executed, what remains are the phenomena of experience, grasped through a *formal interpretive pattern* of the type Edmund Husserl presents in *Logische Untersuchungen*.⁶⁹ Husserl argues that the laws of logic are not normative, meaning that they are not practical rules of how to reason, but purely logical laws.⁷⁰ Husserl is here addressing psychologically oriented philosophers that make the mistake of equating pure logic with the psychological mechanisms of thinking (e.g., Mill and Sigwart). While the former – the logical laws – are of a purely ideal nature, and primarily serve theoretical purposes, the latter are judgements regarding the nature of what is real, and primarily serve methodological and empirical purposes. The logical laws are supportive of and foundational for the psychological mechanisms, but the two should not be conflated, as the

⁶⁹ This essentially has an Aristotelian basis, though Husserl redirects Aristotle’s ontological categories, *matter* and *form*, from the ‘out there’ into ‘experience’, which should not be confused with ‘in there’ as a psychological category (note the discrepancy between the phenomenologies of Brentano and Husserl).

⁷⁰ Husserl 1900/I, pp. 156, 159 (§41)

empirical psychologists are prone to do.⁷¹ The risks involved in equating the two are of methodological significance, since this would undermine the objective knowledge that is the aim of any scientific method. According to Husserl, its results would be merely subjective. When the rules of thought are regarded as psychological entities, they become the source of relativism and can in no way meet the standards that science sets for itself in terms of displaying objective content and meaning.⁷² Interestingly, this is precisely the consequence Katz aims to avoid when he claims a partially ‘realist’ view regarding the experiences of mystics. The problem is that Katz does this, in part, by criticising phenomenology and the phenomenological method for being ‘merely subjective’ and arriving at ‘subjective truths’. This is because he considers phenomenological intuitions to ‘differ’ in content,⁷³ thus allowing no room for mystical experiences and reports to be of a ‘true’ reality. This understanding creates difficulties for those wishing to comprehend Katz’s theory, since it seems to be based on a misconception of the phenomenological method and then framed as a contrast to this misconception.

One of the central problems in interpreting Katz is his total rejection of phenomenology as a method of interpretation; in fact he defines his theory in negative relation to it.⁷⁴ Speaking of this in phenomenological

⁷¹ Husserl 1900/I, p. 159.

⁷² Husserl 1900/I, p. 159 (§41)

⁷³ Katz 1978a, p. 69: “Phenomenologists seem especially prone to this fruitless naivety – all intuit the ‘given’ but their intuitions differ significantly.”

⁷⁴ See Gregory 2006, p. 70, quoting Katz: “we have no trust in the phenomenological method”. Katz understands the phenomenological method as an “intuiting of essences”: “... every phenomenologist seems to intuit as the ‘essence’ of things something quite different from his phenomenological colleagues. The result of the intuiting is only a coterie of unverifiable subjective impressions which seem to owe as much to what the particular phenomenologist *wants* to ‘intuit’ (i.e. he seems to find what he was looking for) as to any truly independent route-finding procedure into the nature of things. ... We have no trust in the phenomenological method.” How closely Katz’s ‘intuiting of essences’ resembles a phenomenological method we need not discuss at the moment. Whatever the phenomenological method *is* – and we understand it primarily as the reductions – Katz cannot be applying it. It should be said, however, that Katz’s criticism of phenomenology targets a number of pseudo-phenomenologists that have not taken the trouble to study Husserl’s phenomenology at

terms, Katz would appear to be thinking that phenomenological bracketing involves a bracketing of the particular ontology of the subject interpreted, when in fact it involves a bracketing of the ontology of the interpreter, allowing her to enter the context of the interpreted person without prejudice. Because of this apparent misunderstanding, Katz believes this approach to be extremely reductive in not taking into account the context of the interpreted, when in reality it is doing just that. In our examination of Katzian contextualism, for example, our aim will be to follow Husserl's lead and work with Katz's ideas without assuming, or even questioning or negating, the truth-value of his propositions. Our aim will not be to bracket *Katz's* particular ontology, epistemology or context; these are the objects we are attempting to understand so as to make sense of how to account for his theory of interpretation. What we intend to bracket in this connection is *our own* theoretical context: our preferences, prejudices, etc. concerning how mystical experiences should be interpreted and understood. We also intend a more general phenomenological reduction by bracketing our own metaphysical assumptions about the nature of reality or the existence or non-existence of God, and so forth. In this way we hope to approach our subject with an open frame of mind.

The following section consists of a presentation of the basic interpretational framework that will guide our analysis of Katz's contextual approach. Our 'tools' come mainly from Husserl's phenomenological recommendations for a sound methodology. These should enable an analysis of the ontological and epistemological basis of Katz's or, for that matter, any other perspective on religion and mysticism.

1.3. A basic Interpretive Framework

The interpretation of mystical experience has taken diverse forms, partly due to the various types of expression that are involved – from music to dance to art to text – and partly due to the various types of methodology that have been applied. Mystical texts, as opposed to other forms of

the source, but instead have relied upon and accepted interpretations of phenomenology that have little to do with Husserl's writings.

expression, carry their own interpretational challenges. For example, mystics are not as systematic as philosophers and interpreters of mystical literature would like them to be. Their literary expressions contain descriptions, analyses and theories embedded in metaphysical, religious, political and emotional categories of lived experience. Mystics combine descriptions of extraordinary experience with commentaries on sacred texts, indications of normative behavioural patterns, recitations of revelations, reformative additions to traditional systems of belief and predictions of future events. To uncover that portion of the contents of a text that is exclusively descriptive of the *experience* of the mystic is often a challenging task that requires precise methods for differentiating between strictly experiential descriptions and those that are related to other matters – e.g., commentaries on sacred texts. As Katz notes, without accessing descriptions of the mystic’s experience we cannot come close to understanding that experience. It is only the mystic that has access to her experience, and all second-hand interpretations are dependent upon the mystic’s report, that is, her description of the content of her experience.⁷⁵ Thus to be able to identify and isolate that content which is directly descriptive of mystical experience is an essential part of understanding this phenomenon.

The major problem encountered in attempts to develop effective methods of differentiation concerns the difficulty of distinguishing between the first-hand interpretative elements (the experiencer’s interpretation of the event) and the purely experiential elements. Second-hand interpreters, such as philosophers of mysticism and other mysticism experts, describe the relation between the mystic’s experience and the mystic’s interpretation of the experience in different ways, among which two distinct types of theories are discernable: 1) experience and its first-hand interpretation are so intertwined that there is no way that the mystic can distinguish between them; and, 2) experience is ‘pure’ (interpretation-independent) and interpretation occurs either during or after the event in question, although the ‘event’ (the *pure* event) can be distinguished from the interpretation by the experiencer. Needless to say,

⁷⁵ By “first-hand interpretation” we mean the interpretation of experience, and by “second-hand interpretation” we mean the interpretation of the reports or first-hand interpretations.

the outcome of a second-hand interpretation of a mystical experience depends upon which of the above two views the second-hand interpreter adopts.

The theoretical consequences of these two different views primarily concern the relation between the religious context of the mystic and the mystical experience itself. The idea that experience and first-hand interpretation are so intertwined as to be indistinguishable, combined with the idea that mystical experience is over-determined by religious beliefs, denies the possibility of finding a common experiential element across religious traditions and excludes the validity of the non-religious aspects of experience. Thus it makes no room for reports of extraordinary (near-death, nature, etc.) experiences that have no apparent connection to religion, but that have phenomenal characteristics and/or common experiential effects that are similar to those found in religiously-based mystical experiences. On the other hand, the idea that experience is pure or interpretation-independent, and that interpretation occurs either during or after the event, points to the possibility of a common experiential element to which either religious or natural interpretations can be applied. Whether or not the latter, non-religious, types of experiences are proper objects of study in mysticism research – whether or not they in some way inform us as to how to interpret experiences reported within the context of religious expressive forms – is a question of relevance for the theoretical basis of empirical investigations that may advance research on mysticism.

In the coming chapters we will examine the theoretical consequences of these two views of mystical experience, and analyse the extent to which each shows regard for the validity of the experiencer's self-understanding and increases our understanding of the phenomenon in question. The following subsections present the basic interpretive framework that will inform and guide this effort. Here the focus will be on providing an explanation of the terms '*experience*' and '*interpretation*' along with other terms that are related to these. The terms '*religion*' and '*mysticism*' will be covered in section 1.4. The purpose of offering these various definitions is to outline a theoretical terminology by which we can interpret the understandings of both Katz and the mystics and mysticism

philosophers he contends with. Being formed under the influence of the ‘phenomenological bracketing’ discussed in the previous section, the following definitions will draw no ontological conclusions regarding the existence and/or nature of ultimate reality.

1.3.1. *Experience*

In commonsensical terms, ‘experience’ is generally referred to as that knowledge which is gathered through repeated personal encounters with everyday reality. The “experienced” individual “knows” things about the realities encountered. Taken one by one, each personal encounter is also referred to as an “experience”, or an instance of gathering knowledge. The relation between “accumulated knowledge” and “encounters” is problematic partly due to the ambiguity of the connection between the two: to what degree does “the accumulated knowledge” influence the “encounter” and to what extent does the “encounter” influence the “accumulated knowledge”? Thus the notion of ‘experience’ requires a more detailed analysis before it can be philosophically applied in the examination of mystical experience. In common parlance, “experience” is thought of as an “encounter”, a relation between a subject and an object or other subject (formalized as ‘sRo’). And yet ‘encounters’ differ from ‘experience’ in one fundamental respect: unlike stones that merely become wet when encountering water, subjects have a prominent feature that enables them to be *aware* of “being wet”, to *reflect* upon the fact, to *position themselves* in an evaluative relation to it (like it or dislike it), and to *act* in response to it. This characteristic is most commonly known as ‘consciousness’, and although its specific nature remains elusive, it is a frequent conceptual ingredient in proposed solutions to the central problems of epistemology.

Looking at the philosophical literature on consciousness we find very different accounts of its nature, functions, and even its existence. William James, who first considered the concept too familiar and obvious to define, later came to deny the existence of consciousness altogether.⁷⁶ It

⁷⁶ In the article, “Does consciousness exist?”, published in 1904, James writes: “For twenty years past I have mistrusted ‘consciousness’ as an entity; for seven or eight years past I have suggested its non-existence to my students, and tried to give them its

is unnecessary to take a position in the eliminativist debate in order to conclude that when the existence of consciousness is denied, the concept of 'consciousness' is used in a very specific way. Since some form of awareness (in some conceptualizations also 'consciousness') is required in order to deny the existence of anything, we must assume that eliminativists are also 'aware' ('conscious' in the 'aware'-sense), but, if they are right, lack consciousness. For those who deny its existence, the term 'consciousness' seems sometimes to designate a substantial, often essentially pure, pole from which 'awareness' is supposed to emerge: that which is supposed to function as a unifier of experience and a residence of all experience; that which makes us aware of goings on in the field of consciousness events. Through the rejection of the notion of consciousness different conceptions of consciousness arise, and whatever may be meant by consciousness, its central role in epistemological accounts of experience remains intact.

We next present an interpretation of Husserl's theory of perceptual experience that will serve as a reference point in the coming discussion on mystical experience, pure experience and the cognitive foundation for experience in general. This does not mean that mystical experience – or even 'pure experience' or experience in general – must be perceptual (in the sense of being based on sensual perception). Husserl's account of perceptual experience involves a role for consciousness that can be applied to non-perceptual experience as well.

pragmatic equivalent in realities of experience. It seems to me that the hour is ripe for it to be openly and universally discarded.” [James 1904, p 4] In *Principles of psychology* (1890) James claims that “Everyone agrees that we [through introspection] discover states of consciousness”. Though this may seem as a contradiction, there need not be any contrast between denying consciousness as an entity and accepting the existence of states of consciousness.

1.3.2. *A phenomenological account of 'experience'*

Husserl's account of experience requires some acquaintance with his theory of the phenomenological reductions. The *epoché* adopted in the above section is primarily a suspension of the assumption that the objects of perception have a mind-independent existence.⁷⁷ In phenomenological terms, this type of assumption is involved in *apperception*.⁷⁸ A variety of other assumptions are also classified by some phenomenologists as *apperceptions*. Among these are the assumptions that the object in question is extended in space, that no other object can simultaneously be located in the same place, that it has an essential or substantial structural persistence through time, that it has certain innate qualities that occur independently of other objects or qualities, that it can be expected to behave/react in certain ways when exposed to certain types of procedure, that it has a reverse side that may display different qualities from those presented from the present point of view, and so forth.

Although these types of *apperception* are all automatically present in experience, they are such that they are not readily presented as isolated elements to the experiencer. Consequently, an initial distinction is drawn between *apperceived* and *appresented* material. This distinction is meant to indicate that there are aspects of an experience that are not directly presented, but are in a sense perceived. *Appresented* material in a perceptual act is not itself *apperceived* because it is not objectified although it may be a constitutive part of the experience; it is experienced but not perceived because perception requires (or *is*) apperception.⁷⁹ The notions '*apperception*' and '*appresentation*' will be further illuminated in the following

⁷⁷ The Greek term *epoche*, borrowed from the ancient sceptics, is synonymous with the German term *Einklammerung*, in its English translation 'bracketing'. Both 'bracketing' and 'epoche' will be used interchangeably throughout this section.

⁷⁸ In Husserl, 1900/II/2, p. 232 in § 4, under the headline "Beilage", Husserl explains that all external objects are transcendently apperceived in the natural attitude (and natural scientific mind-set). After discussing this in the context of internal and external perception, and the confusion that Brentano's notion of 'internal' and 'external' has caused, Husserl claims that external perception *is* apperception (p. 233).

⁷⁹ Husserl 1900/II/2, p. 233.

discussion concerning the process of constituting intentional objects. They are mentioned here mostly to indicate what the phenomenological reduction is intended to do. Apperceptions are meant to be bracketed in order to make it possible to subject the 'objective' content to analysis. Husserl writes:

Phenomenology is according to the theory of experiences in general, inclusive of all matters, whether real (*reellen*) or intentional, given in experiences, and evidently discoverable in them. Pure phenomenology is accordingly the theory of the essences of 'pure phenomena', the phenomena of a 'pure consciousness' or of a 'pure ego': it does not build on the ground, given by transcendent apperception, of physical and animal, and so of psycho-physical nature, it makes no empirical assertions, it propounds no judgements which relate to objects transcending consciousness: it establishes no truths concerning natural realities, whether physical or psychic – no psychological truths, therefore, in the historical sense – and borrows no such truths as assumed premises. It rather takes all apperceptions and judgemental assertions which point beyond what is given in adequate, purely immanent intuition, which point beyond the pure stream of consciousness, and treats them purely as the experiences they are in themselves: it subjects them to a purely immanent, purely descriptive examination into essence.⁸⁰

In Husserl's understanding, the main reason to suspend metaphysical assumptions about the nature of reality is to reveal our own acts of consciousness and by this to enable an unbiased analysis of the phenomenal content of experience (*noematic* analysis). In a normal naturalistic attitude, the objects encountered in experience are not bracketed; they are experienced (*apperceived*) as 'real' objects that can be related to in various ways. We relate to objects according to the nature and properties that *we* ascribe to them, adopting particular attitudes and forms of conduct in relation to this or that natural object. The problem with this approach is that we may think or conduct ourselves improperly if we happen to be wrong about the nature of the object in question. If it is possible to be wrong about a perceived object, this indicates that objects are not given as they are in perception, they are given as perceived. What 'perception' *is* and what it *does* will be discussed forthwith.

⁸⁰ Husserl 1900/II/2, p. 235-6. Translated by J. N. Findlay 1970, quoted from *Logical investigations II*, Routledge Keenan and Paul 1976, pp. 862-3.

In Husserl's account, intentionality – that which is actively involved in constituting our objects of perception – forms the identification of objects in the field of experience. This identification of objects is necessary if we want to classify phenomena in terms of 'sameness' and 'difference'. Before looking at the process of identification, we want to emphasise that it is not our aim to engage in Husserlian exegesis. We have merely adopted a set of concepts from Husserl's theory of consciousness that we believe will be useful in our analysis of Katz's theory of interpretation. Our aim in this section is to form a clear idea of our account of 'intentional object' since it plays a major part in our future discussions concerning the experiences of mystics.

Although Husserl adopted Franz Brentano's term 'intentionality' (who in turn adopted it from the medieval Scholastics), he eventually rejected the meaning that Brentano had assigned it. Robert Solomon describes this relation as follows:

Brentano believed that all acts were directed toward objects; and in order to maintain this thesis he wavered between Meinongian idealism and an unsatisfactory realism, populating his ontology with 'unreal' entities on the one hand, denying the reality of unfulfilled acts on the other. Husserl resolved this dilemma by denying the universality of intentionality in *this* sense. In place of the thesis that consciousness always takes an object, he substituted the thesis that consciousness is always directed.⁸¹

The most important difference between the above two accounts of intentionality is that while in Brentano's notion of intentionality "every mental phenomenon includes something as object within itself",⁸² in Husserl's theory of intentionality, acts do not contain 'objects', they have, in Husserl's terms, *morphe* and *hyle*.⁸³ A consequence of this is that while Brentano's intentionality is directed towards an object, or *contains* an object, Husserl's intentionality is *constitutional* of objects. We will shortly attempt to explain what this means, but first we must emphasise

⁸¹ Solomon 1977, p. 177.

⁸² Brentano 1874, in English translation (from 1973) here quoted from Routledge edition 1997 p. 88.

⁸³ See Husserl 1913, foremost § 85. Spiegelberg defines *hyle* as "the immanent, non-intentional material for an intentional act which by this act is formed into a transcendent, intentional object." (Spiegelberg 1976, p. 718)

that it does not mean either that the mind creates (or constructs) the surrounding world or that it projects its psychological intentions to the world of experience; it means that a constitutional process takes place in which aspects of phenomenal experience are identified as objects. Aaron Gurwitsch's interpretation of Husserl's account of intentionality is that:

Intentionality means the objectivating function of consciousness. In its most elementary form, this function consists in confronting the subject with senses, ideal unities, to which, as identical ones, he is free to revert an indefinite number of times.⁸⁴

The assumption that the phenomenal objects of perception are mind-independently existent is also a feature of intentionality, and can as such be bracketed (or suspended). This procedure as applied to visual perception results in a phenomenal field that is not filled with 'objects' but with variously shaped patches of colour (or rather with light experienced in different angles with various degrees of intensity and of various quality – but these are rather difficult to talk about since we do not have the differentiating terms for these specific aspects of phenomenal experience). To go from this field of colours and shapes to the identification of 'objects' a process of organization must take place. We take a brief look at the process involved in individuating objects in a phenomenal field by analysing this process in terms of the concepts of 'sameness' and 'difference'. The purpose of this discussion is to form a conception of 'intentional object', a term that will frequently be used in our analysis and upon which many of our reflections and conclusions rest.

Seen from the perspective of patches of colour in various shapes, it might not be a simple task to squeeze the juice out of the 'yellow lemon' that is sitting on 'the brown table'. What I usually identify as a 'lemon' is now (after the suspension of existential assumptions) an indefinite number of shades of yellow in an indefinite number of shapes which I have no exact method of classifying geometrically. In this state, 'the table' being 'brown' (as I use to perceive it, in the natural attitude) appears to be a dramatic generalization of the innumerable shades of 'brown' that are represented in my visual field. Some of the lighter

⁸⁴ Gurwitsch 1966, p. 138.

'brown' shades are actually very similar to the darker 'yellow' spots on what I usually would identify as a 'lemon', so similar that at times they seem identical. This phenomenally experienced identity of shade and shape does not enable me to identify the 'lemon': a certain configuration of form and colour that in all probability is continuously 'shifting' with continuously changing circumstances. Thus what I encounter in my phenomenal field of vision, that which is 'given' in a certain sense, is by no means a 'lemon', or even an 'object', but rather what in Husserl's terms would be called the *hyletic* content of my lemon-experience.⁸⁵

However, as Solomon notes, the purpose of this analysis is not merely to restate the "epistemological platitude that we never simply 'see' material objects, but only material objects from a certain perspective, within a certain context, and so on".⁸⁶ Although it is in itself not meaningful until made sense of by an act (or a number of acts), *hyletic* material is regarded by Husserl as having the peculiarity of being a mediator between subject and object in the sense that it forms or restricts the number of interpretations we can give to an act of perception. The function of *hyletic* data within perceptual contexts is to provide one with information on consciousness-independent reality, although it cannot do that by itself since there are no 'objects' *given* in perception. In phenomenological terms, when one normally looks at a 'lemon' what one sees is an

⁸⁵ In *Ideen einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie* Husserl warns against equating *hyle* with sense-data, because sense-data are generally associated with the impressions of 'objects', and *hyle* is by no means objects – not even intentional objects. 'Objects' (of whatever kind that may appear in experience) are always constituted, and *hyletic* material is assumed to function as the basis of their constitution, 'representing' the features of a mind-independent world of experience. (See Husserl 1913, § 85) In this connection, Husserl also adds that even what we generally regard as a 'pure sensation' (such as a pain or a patch of colour) also requires intentionality and constitution to be experienced.

⁸⁶ Solomon 1977, p. 171. Solomon argues that Gurwitsch's analysis of Husserl's concept of the *noema* is reductive in this way. The problem is that Gurwitsch assigns the concept of *noema* the status of a material object. In connection with his criticism of Gurwitsch's interpretation, Solomon argues that "the sensory matter or '*hyletic* data' of perception are not introduced on the *noematic* side of the act, but rather in the *noesis* itself. The purpose of this move is precisely to avoid making the sensory into an object." (Solomon 1977, p. 170)

Abschattung (or ‘aspectual modality’⁸⁷) of it because it manifests qualities that will disappear when seen from a different angle of vision.

To constitute the identification of an ‘object’ with which one can interact and from which one can expect certain experiences, the *Abschattung* must be integrated with *apperceptual* and *appresentational* materials such as the conviction that it has mind-independent existence, that it has certain innate lemon-like qualities, that one remembers that the lemon has been placed on the table, and so forth. My ability to ‘look for’ the lemon rests entirely on the intentional characteristic of consciousness and, more specifically, on the *noema* of my intentional act.

Solomon also notes that the concept of ‘*noema*’ has been interpreted in different ways in different philosophical traditions. The analytically oriented interpreters of Husserl have identified ‘*noema*’ with the ‘*Sinn*’ or ‘meaning’ intended by Frege in his conceptual analysis; psychologically oriented interpreters, on the other hand, have identified Husserl’s *noema* with a ‘perceptual object’ – bracketed, but nonetheless perceptual.⁸⁸ Husserl’s analysis of intentionality is valid both in the context of perceptual phenomena and in that of logical/semantic analysis. Our purpose in this context is to develop a notion of ‘intentional object’ that can be applied in both logical and phenomenal analysis.

Let us continue for a moment with Gurwitsch’s presentation of perceptual analysis, which sheds light on the process of identification of objects. Gurwitsch distinguishes the ‘real object’ from the ‘*noema*’ in the

⁸⁷ In phenomenological texts, the general English language term for *abschattung* is ‘adumbration’. Since the standard definitions of this word seem far removed from what Husserl intended by *abschattung*, I have chosen to replace it with the phrase ‘aspectual modality’, in the hope that it will be more meaningful.

⁸⁸ Solomon 1977, pp. 168-9. Solomon even claims that “Gurwitsch’s examples, as well as his analysis, leave no doubt that the ‘objects’ he has in mind are in virtually every case *material* (perceptual) objects”, though I am not quite that sure that Gurwitsch identifies the ‘perceptual’ with the ‘material’. If it is bracketed Gurwitsch cannot be thinking of it as a ‘material’ object, he has no way of telling whether it is or not (and neither is it very interesting). This does not interfere with the fact that there is a point to Solomon’s distinction between different interpretations of the concept of *noema*.

precise sense that we have described the difference between the ‘lemon’ and its multiple-representations as experienced through a series of acts.⁸⁹

The *noema*, as distinct from the real object as well as from the act, turns out to be an unreal or ideal entity which belongs to the same sphere as meanings or significations. This is the sphere of sense (*Sinn*). The unreality of entities belonging to this sphere lies, first of all, in their atemporality, i.e., in a certain independence of the concrete act by which they are actualized, in the sense that every one of them may correspond, as identically the same, to another act, and even to an indefinite number of acts. *Noemata* are not to be found in perceptual life alone. There is a *noema* corresponding to every act of memory, expectation, representation, imagination, thinking, judging, volition, and so on. In all these cases, the object, matter of fact, etc., in itself, towards which the subject directs himself through the act, is to be distinguished from the object just, exactly just, as the subject has it in view, as, through the act, the object stands before the subject’s mind.⁹⁰

With reference to its ontological status, the *noema* seems to stand between the ‘real object’ and the act of consciousness, and it is worth noting that in Gurwitsch’s account the *noema* is considered to be ‘irreal’ (ideal) because of its atemporal nature. In strict ontological terms, ‘real’ objects are temporal, particular and located in space. They can be counted (insofar as they have been identified), and they follow the laws of nature, not of logical reasoning. Real objects are countable because they occupy a certain space in time, and no two objects (say, two lemons), however qualitatively similar, can occupy the same space at the same moment of time. With respect to the question of ‘similarity’ and ‘difference’, two objects are considered ‘similar’ if most of their phenomenal (experienceable) properties are shared; and if they share *all* properties they are (experientially) individuated by the specific location in space that they do not share with other objects – i.e., by their relational properties. Metaphysically speaking, they are ‘self-subsistent’, or ‘independent’ of other objects. If I experience a ‘real’ lemon, its existence is not dependent either on my experiencing it or on other objects, such as ‘that other lemon on my brown table’. A corollary of this is that the colour and shape of the ‘real’ lemon are not objects, since they lack

⁸⁹ Gurwitsch 1966, p. 132.

⁹⁰ Gurwitsch 1966, p. 133.

independent existence. These methods of individuation can be applied to spatio-temporal objects, but what kind of individuation can be applied to an atemporal or ideal object/entity?

What about the *noema*? Can *noemata* be quantitatively measured? Is there a relation of correspondence between *noema* and object, or are *noemata* – like objects – also individuated by acts? How many *noemata* would I have if I saw two lemons on the table? And if I were to think of a lemon (intentionally looking for it) and then be presented with a basket full of lemons, would I be able to find or recognize the lemon I was thinking of (or looking for)?

In Gurwitsch's account, acts are individuated occurrences and so are the *noemata*, which in turn stay the *same* through the variety of acts that may be directed towards an object.⁹¹ According to Gurwitsch, the relation that holds between acts of consciousness and *noemata* is not a one-to-one correspondence:

To each act there corresponds a *noema* – namely, an object just, exactly and only just, as the subject is aware of it and has it in view, when he is experiencing the act in question. *Consciousness* is not to be mistaken for a mere unidimensional sphere composed of acts, as real psychical events, which co-exist and succeed one another. Rather, it ought to be considered as a *correlation, or correspondence, or parallelism between the plane of acts, psychical events, noeses, and a second plane which is that of sense (noemata)*. This correlation is such that corresponding to each act is its *noema*, but the same *noema* may correspond to an indefinite number of acts. It is then not a one-to-one correspondence.

The *noetico-noematic* correlation is what the term intentionality must signify. In this light the formula consciousness *of* something is to be understood: a conscious act is an act of awareness, presenting to the subject who experiences it a sense, an ideal atemporal unity, identical, i.e., identifiable.⁹²

Here we are told that *noemata* are objects of awareness, “exactly and only just” as they appear to a subject when he experiences an act, and that a

⁹¹ Gurwitsch 1966, p. 139. Gurwitsch writes: “Objectivity is identifiableness, i.e., the possibility of reverting again and again to what, through the present experienced act, is offered to consciousness and the possibility of so doing whether in the same or in any other mode of awareness. This holds good for real as well as ideal objects.”

⁹² Gurwitsch 1966, p. 138.

relation of correspondence exists between the acts and their *noemata*. Although we want to pick up on the ‘objectivating’ or ‘individuating’ function of intentionality that Gurwitsch advances, there still are problems concerning the relationship between *noemata* and real objects, problems that can be traced to the individuation of the *noema*. This will be an important issue in the upcoming discussion on problems of ‘sameness’ and ‘difference’ in experience. To determine whether the objects in the experiences of mystics are the same, similar or different, one must first identify the elements that one wishes to compare.

Even if the “same *noema* may correspond to an indefinite number of acts”, it is, in Gurwitsch’s account, the acts that constitute the individuation criteria for a *noema* – i.e., to each act there is one *noema* – and if acts are not countable then neither are *noemata*. And if *noemata* are uncountable, it is logically impossible to say what relations there are between the real object and the *noema*. In other words, the real objects cannot be correlated with the *noemata* or acts. My perception of one lemon may require a number of acts, but so does my perception of two lemons or a basket full of lemons. The fact that the *noema* stays ‘the same’ throughout the number of ‘different’ acts that constitute it can only mean that *noemata* are identifiable and thus ‘real’, in the sense that ‘identifiable’ implies. Thus if it is not the acts that individuate the *noema*, what about the possibility that the *noema* are individuated by way of *hyletic* material? Pure *hyletic* material, however, is only a certain amount of chaotic nonsense until individuated (and made sense of) by acts, which means that with respect to *hyle* there are also problems of individuation for the *noema*. *Hyle* functions to restrict the number of shapes a *noema* can take and to mediate mind-independent reality.⁹³ However, in its function as a mediator of mind-independent reality, it is incapable of revealing the ‘real object’. The reason is that objects in general need to be revealed through a number of acts, with each act being based upon its own *hyle*. Moreover, it may very well be that these acts work by way of *hyle* to limit the possible outcomes in terms of *noemata* – and eventually individuate

⁹³ See also the discussion concerning the double function of *hyle* in Haglund 1977, pp. 200-5.

the ‘intentional object’. However, if *hyle* is characterized as ‘sensual data’⁹⁴ it obviously cannot limit (or individuate) the *noemata* of non-perceptual experiences like *thinking* of a lemon.

Nevertheless, numerical identity in the world of physical objects also requires demarcation criteria in terms of the qualitative features of the objects in question. The identification of an object requires recognitional criteria in terms of *quality* as opposed to *property*, if by ‘property’ we mean ontological criteria for object identification, and by ‘quality’ we mean phenomenological criteria for the same. The problems of fallible perception persist through the phenomenological reductions; they are neither eliminated nor solved, only set aside. We do not ask whether the qualitative aspects of our experienced reality correspond exactly to some essence or essential property in a ‘reality’ independent of experience; we take them at ‘face value’. With respect to the problems of fallibility, the phenomenological reduction (i.e., the ‘setting aside’ of existential judgements) functions to reveal the acts that constitute the objects in our experiences. This helps to determine the points where fallibility is, or may be, a factor. A real object may very well exist, yet still be partially misapprehended (be ascribed non-actualized properties). In such a case, its existence does not matter: it is improperly individuated and thus there is still no one-to-one correspondence between a real object and an intentional object. The responsibility for the fallible aspects of perception and thinking rests with the surplus of the *noema*, what we have called ‘*apperceptive*’ elements in the intentional object.

Our intent in this limited context has not been to solve either the problem of the double function of *hyle* or the problematic status and individuation of the *noema*. These considerations have been discussed with the specific intent of providing an understanding of the notion of ‘intentional object’ that will be useful in our analysis of Katz’s theory of interpretation of mystical experience. To summarize the perceptual

⁹⁴ Husserl warns against identifying *hyle* with ‘sensual data’ since, reasonably enough, sensual data also have an interpretive aspect if they are *experienced*. *Hyle* is supposedly ‘pure’ (amorphous) while ‘sensual data’ are not. See Husserl’s discussion in Husserl 1913, §85.

process that has been described in phenomenological terms, we could say that:

- i) Non-qualitative data (*hyle*) function as a limitation to the forms that the *noema* can take.⁹⁵
- ii) The objectivating function of intentionality makes *hyletic* material available to cognition by constitution and individuation of ‘objects’.
- iii) When the *noesis* is formed through the combination of *hyle* and *morphe* in the case of a perceptual act, the *noema* defines the perceptual content just, and only just, as it is presented to the perceiver.

We have not yet said how apperceptual and appresentational content function in relation to the *noema*. As we initially indicated, the existential setting is a form of apperception, and this procedure is not given experientially, it can be performed independently of the ‘matter of fact’ condition of the ‘object’. In this respect, there is no distinction between imaginary and real objects. This, however, should not be misunderstood to mean that only imaginary objects are included in the phenomenological analysis – imaginary objects in a natural attitude being: unicorns, mermaids and other not non-spatio-temporal entities. They *are* included as intentional objects, and they may be intended or talked about ‘as existent’, i.e., they can be *apperceived*. The problem with these objects is that from an empirical standpoint they cannot be intersubjectively individuated, so that we can be sure that we speak of the *same* Santa, unicorn, or mermaid. That is, they can not be *perceived*, but they certainly are *apperceived*.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Compare this to Dick Haglund’s distinction in Haglund 1984, where he discusses the problems concerning the function of *hyle* to delimit the *noema* in combination with the fact that *hyle* lacks phenomenal properties. Haglund points out that the function of *hyle* is to limit the *noema*, although not completely since there would be no problem of fallible or illusive perception in that case. Haglund suggests that we should separate the two functions of *hyle* in order to enable the contradicting features of *hyle* to collaborate.

⁹⁶ Compare to Husserl’s “Ist ein äusserer Gegenstand wahrgenommen (das Haus), so sind in *dieser* Wahrnehmung die präsentierenden Empfindungen erlebt, aber nicht wahrgenommen. Indem wir uns über die Existenz des Hauses täuschen, täuschen wir uns über die Existenz der erlebten sinnlichen Inhalte schon darum nicht, weil wir über sie gar nicht urteilen, bzw. sie in dieser Wahrnehmung nicht wahrnehmen.” We cannot

Appresented material is also *hyletically* based, although we have not addressed the complicated question of how appresentations function in relation to memory – i.e., to what extent they can be retained. While an exhaustive discussion on this issue would be inappropriate here, suffice it to say that the bulk of problems posited by cognitive science circle around it. What we can say, however, is that both apperceived and appresented experiential content play a large part in memory and in the future constitution of objects, and also in judgemental processes concerning phenomena not presently perceived. A single perceptual identification-act might seem to require the involvement of memory in its constitutive process, and by that co-presented with the *apperceptual* (sense-based) content.

It is in these terms that we want to define our notion of *intentional objects*:

Intentional Object: *The object apperceived through the synthesis of intentional acts, which – in the case of perception – is based on the presence of hyle.*

We began this subsection with Husserl's definition of *pure* phenomenology as “the theory of the essences of pure phenomena, phenomena of a pure consciousness or of a pure ego”. On this basis we have learned that ‘pure phenomena’ appear when the intentional object is stripped of its apperceptive aspects (in perception we are left with an *Abschattung* of the object that we have discussed in terms of ‘patches of colour’). Before we move on to the notions of ‘pure self’ and ‘pure consciousness’ we need to clarify certain issues concerning the ‘intentional object’ in relation to Katz's epistemology of experience.

1.3.3. Katz's model of intentionality and objects

Although Katz regularly emphasises the inadequacy of both the phenomenological method and of phenomenological analysis, his vocabulary often makes it appear as if he is speaking as a phenomenologist. However, the fact that Katz makes use of terms such as ‘intentional object’ and ‘intentional acts’ does not necessarily indicate

be wrong or right about the sense-data (*Empfindungen*) since we do not make any judgements about them at all, and they are therefore not apperceived.

that he ascribes the same meanings to these terms as we do. Let us take a look at Katz's account of intentionality:

This entire area of the 'intentionality' of experience and language of experience as it relates to mysticism is a rich area for further study. By way of only introducing the significance of this topic for our concerns, I will merely suggest that, if one looks closely at the language of mystics, as well as at mystical devotion, practices, and literature, one will find that much of it is 'intentional' in the sense suggested by Husserl and Brentano. Though I am no great admirer of either with regard to their more general metaphysical positions, their discussion of 'intentional language' per se is instructive, for it calls to our attention, that certain terms such as 'expects', 'believes', 'hopes', 'seeks', 'searches', 'desires', 'wants', 'finds', 'looks for', involve as Brentano said, 'an object in themselves'. We must heed the warning that the linguistic intentionality does not generate or guarantee the existence of the 'intentional object', but we must also recognise the epistemologically formative character of intentional language mirroring as it does intentional acts of consciousness. Using the language modern phenomenologists favour we might say that 'intentionality' means to describe a 'datum as meant', i. e. to be aware that an action includes a reach for some specific meaning or meaningful content.⁹⁷

We see here that Katz bases his understanding of 'intentionality' on linguistic features, and connects it to the descriptive empirical psychology that Husserl leaves behind with the *epoché*.⁹⁸ What we must ask in this circumstance is what it means that "linguistic intentionality does not generate or guarantee the existence of the 'intentional object'". If intentional terms "involve ... 'an object in themselves'" and this 'object' is the 'intentional object' then how can it not exist? There seems to be a discrepancy in these terms that requires some explaining. If Katz means, with reference to Brentano, that intentionality includes or involves or contains an 'object', then it cannot be an 'object' that does not exist. Katz must mean that it is the natural referent of the intensional expression that does not exist, or, put differently, that the object that corresponds to the representation is not real. As we have said, Santa,

⁹⁷ Katz 1978a, p. 63.

⁹⁸ See for instance *Die Idee der Phänomenologie* where he explicitly states this after introducing the bracketing of existential settings: "We are finally leaving the ground of psychology, even that of descriptive psychology" (my translation). This is a major point in the totality of Husserl's work.

mermaids and unicorns are all objects that do not exist, yet we talk about them and have intentional acts constituting them. This does not mean other than the truisms that “we can talk about things that do not exist” or “there are words in language that do not have natural referents”. This awkward usage of the term ‘intentional object’ turns out to be more significant than it would seem at first; it raises a problem which is at the heart of the most central difference between the positions of Husserl and Brentano. As will be shown, Katz’s position leans on a notion of intentionality that is mainly Brentano’s, and Brentano’s notion is informed by the pre-bracketed, natural attitude that Husserl claimed to be inadequate for an analysis of experience. According to Husserl, Brentano’s mistake was that when he considered the fallibility of perception, he included the ‘psychological phenomena’ as ‘objects’ in the analysed experiences:

We are told that: Outer perception is not evident, and is even delusive. This is undoubtedly the case if we mean by the ‘physical phenomena’ what such perception perceives, physical things, their properties and changes etc. But when Brentano exchanges his authentic, and alone permissible sense of the word ‘perceive’, for an improper sense which relates, not to external objects, but to presenting contents, i.e., contents present as real parts (*reell angehörigen*) in perception, and when he consequently gives the name of ‘physical phenomena’, not merely to outer objects, but also to these contents, these latter seem infected with the fallibility of outer perception..⁹⁹

In the end, this view of the contents of experience must lead to a sceptical position regarding all elements of experience to the effect that even the self-evident phenomena are doubted. It is a reflection of the problems involved in assuming a natural attitude when entertaining epistemological concerns. The *epoche* is the solution to these problems, as no existential judgments are made concerning the phenomena of experience, and thus the phenomena stand on an equal ontological level of reality.

Relating this difference between Husserl and Brentano back to Katz’s awkward usage of the term ‘intentional object’, it appears that his

⁹⁹ Husserl 1900/II/2, p. 237. Translation by J. N. Findlay 1970, in *Logical Investigations, vol II*, Routledge & Keegan Paul Ltd 1976, p. 864.

analysis of experience is formed in a natural (non-bracketed) attitude and that his sense of 'intentional objects' is quite different from the phenomenological sense intended in our definition of this term.

The following definitions will serve as a means of distinguishing between these two notions of intentional object:

Real Object: *A selfsubsistent entity in a mind-independent world of objects.*

If intensional language mirrors intentional acts of consciousness, then 'look for', 'seek' and 'search' denote intentional acts, and consequently when Katz says that "linguistic intentionality does not generate or guarantee the existence of the 'intentional object'", he must mean that it "does not generate or guarantee the existence of the '[real] object'". This would mean that we can seek, search and look for objects that do not exist. What then happens to the notion 'object' that linguistic intentionality is supposed to involve? What sense would it make to say, "That 'object' may not exist"? Do we seek, search and look for nothing? We can safely say that this is generally not the case.

Looking at this from a semantic perspective: does the truth value of sentences of the type "P looks for *o*" change if *o* does not exist? Is P looking for nothing, or is P not looking at all? In intensional cases where the 'intentional' (i.e., 'real') object does not exist, there must be some other entity whose existence is beyond doubt in order to sustain the reality of the intentional act. Expressed differently, the truth-conditions of the sentence, "P is looking for *o*", concern P's looking for *o*, not the existence of *o*. Thus when Katz refers to the necessity of including an 'object' in the intentional act (or intensional semantic context), the intentional object referred to appears to be some form of 'representation' of objects – ideal entities that may or may not be correlated to any natural occurrences whatsoever. These objects are subjective in the sense that no one has access to them except the person who intends them. We call them 'irreal objects':

Irreal Object: *An object internal to consciousness that is psychologically represented as a real object – i.e. a non-existing, merely imagined real object.*

Katz does not explicitly use the terms 'real' and 'irreal object', and he has no definition or explication regarding what an 'intentional object' is. In

our view, Katz's notion of the term 'intentional object' means something other than 'intentional object' in the phenomenological sense, and this for two fundamental reasons: first, the idea that the intentional object is a constituted entity does not appear to be represented in Katz's perspective; and, second, Katz in no sense adopts the phenomenological *epoché* in his approach. If anything, he has shown great scepticism towards it.

What nature the object of intention is ascribed in different accounts of experience plays a major role in the conceptualization of different notions of pure experience. Before discussing the different meanings that may be attached to the notion of pure experience, we explore the different meanings that may be attached to the notion of "self" or "ego" in the literature on mystical experience, also a major factor in different conceptualizations of pure experience. In this way we attempt to more exactly identify what it is that Katz denies in his statement, "there are NO pure ... experiences".¹⁰⁰

1.3.4. Empirical ego and pure self

The discussion that initiated this section concerned the denial among certain philosophers that consciousness exists, and how it is in a very specific sense that the 'existence' of consciousness is denied. Again, we must distinguish the question of existence from the question of phenomenally experienced entities. We recently discussed the possibility that there may be both phenomenal experiences and discussions of things that appear not to exist. Here we bracket the question of whether or not a 'pure self' exists in order to open the way for a discussion on different conceptions of the self, and the manner in which the 'self' is phenomenally experienced, or, rather, constituted.

We can begin our discussion by taking a look at Galen Strawson's attempt to explicate man's experience and conception of his "self":

What then is the ordinary human sense of self, in so far as we can generalize about it? I propose that it is (at least) the sense that people have of themselves as being, specifically, a mental presence; a mental someone;

¹⁰⁰ Katz 1978a, p. 26

a single mental thing that is a conscious subject of experience, that has a certain character or personality, and that is in some sense *distinct from all its particular experiences, thoughts and so on*, and indeed from all other things.¹⁰¹

One problem with this account is the occurrence of ‘mental’ in relation to ‘presence’, ‘someone’ and ‘thing’. This implies a metaphysical position concerning the nature of this ‘self’ (viz. that of its being ‘mental’), and the best way to overcome this difficulty is to ‘bracket’ the term ‘mental’ in the above quotation. Whatever its nature, properties or factual existence may turn out to be, if we take Strawson’s proposal seriously (after excluding the term ‘mental’), the self is *experienced* as an entity, separate from other entities, and, as a starting point for our discussion, “*distinct from all its particular experiences, thoughts and so on*”. In a conception of ‘self’ as being the sum of, or equivalent to, particular thoughts and experiences, there is no need to posit a ‘self’ that is distinct from all that. Since it is difficult (if not impossible) to deny the occurrence of *experiences* and *thoughts*, a denial of the ‘self’s’ existence is generally a denial in this latter sense – i.e., a denial that it is *something else* (other than the experiencing and thinking person) who is *having* the experiences and thoughts. For the purpose of clarity and to facilitate our discussion on different accounts of the ‘self’ (accounts that can be found in both mystical literatures and philosophical investigations), we introduce a set of concepts to help distinguish between these separate notions of self (both of which have different functional and qualitative attributes):¹⁰²

Pure Self: *The non-empirical, primitive, experience-transcending self; consciousness as an entity separate from empirical qualities*

¹⁰¹ Strawson 2000 (in *Models of the self*, ed. Gallagher and Shear, first published in *Journal of consciousness studies* 4, 1997. *Models of the self*, also contains several articles criticising Strawson’s conceptualization of the self. See for instance Hirstein’s and Ramachandran’s neuroscientific model in “Three laws of qualia: what neurology tells us about the biological functions of consciousness, qualia and the self”, where they argue that the experience of a unified self, distinct from all experience and thoughts, is an illusion caused by neurobiological processes.)

¹⁰² The distinction between these two notions of ‘self’ is commonly made, although the terms used to draw the distinction tend to vary. As examples, there is Mead’s famous ‘I-‘Me’ and Fisher’s ‘Self-‘I’.

Empirical Self: *The experienceable and experiencing self; consciousness as the sum of a person's intentional acts (particular experiences and particular thoughts).*

These should be viewed as technical terms that enable us to understand some of the conceptual manifestations of 'pure self', and should *not* be taken as designating different parts of the self. As has been emphasised several times, our aim here is not to establish the existence of any entity; rather it is to enable an understanding of the controversy surrounding some of the philosophical and mystical accounts of the self. And although the above distinction between the primitive self and the empirical self by no means exhausts the various ways of conceptualizing the 'self' in philosophical and mystical texts, the separation of the primitive from the empirical self has had several functions for philosophers and mystics. Among these functions we find the often emphasised one of unifying experiences into a system or complex that remains identical throughout the contingencies and changes over time that constitute the empirical self. The identification of the 'self' with the phenomena (more accurately 'stream') of thinking and experiencing is not uncommon among modern phenomenologists,¹⁰³ and Husserl also held this view in his *Logische Untersuchungen*. After quoting Natorp and referring to investigators that had embraced Kant's theory of the 'pure self' (those who give the 'self' the function of being the 'pole' of all experience), Husserl claimed that:

I must frankly confess, however, that I am quite unable to find this ego, this primitive, necessary centre of relations. The only thing I can take note of, and therefore perceive, are the empirical ego and its empirical relations to its own experiences, or to such external objects as are receiving special attention at the moment, while much remains, whether 'without' or 'within', which has no such relation to the ego.¹⁰⁴

In a note inserted for the second edition of *Logische Untersuchungen* (1913 – simultaneous with the publication of *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologische Philosophie*), Husserl adds, however,

¹⁰³ See for instance Gurwitsch's article "A non-egological notion of consciousness", in Gurwitsch 1966,

¹⁰⁴ Husserl 1900/II/1, p. 361. Translation by J. N. Findlay 1970, in *Logical investigations I*, Routledge & Keegan Paul 1976, pp. 549-50.

I have since managed to find it, i.e. have learned not to be led astray from a pure grasp of the given through corrupt forms of ego-metaphysic.¹⁰⁵

There are perfectly sound phenomenological reasons to regard the notion of a pure self as irrelevant in phenomenological contexts, since a *transcendental* 'self' cannot be experienced and is thus phenomenologically irrelevant. We will not speculate as to why Husserl had the change of mind indicated in the above note. The important thing to emphasise (and perhaps part of the reason Husserl altered his view) is that this pure self is the *same*, and functions as a chain that links all diverse experiences into a unified system. In *Ideen* Husserl expresses this view and prepares us for the effect of the phenomenological reduction in connection with the pure Ego:

So much is clear from the outset, that after carrying this reduction through, we shall never stumble across the pure Ego as an experience among others within the flux of manifold experiences which survives as transcendental residuum; nor shall we meet it as a constitutive bit of experience appearing with experience of which it is an integral part and again disappearing. The Ego appears to be permanently, even necessarily, there, and this permanence is obviously not that of a solid unshifting experience, of a "fix idea". On the contrary, it belongs to every experience that comes in streams past, its "glance" goes "through" every actual *cogito*, and towards the object. This visual ray changes with every *cogito*, shooting forth afresh with each new one as it comes, and disappearing with it. But the Ego remains self-identical. In principle, at any rate, every *cogitatio* can change, can come and go, even though it may be open to doubt whether each is *necessarily* perishable, and not merely, as we find it, perishable *in point of fact*. But in contrast to the pure Ego appears to be *necessary* in principle, and as that which remains absolutely self-identical in all real and possible changes of experience, it can *in no sense* be reckoned as a *real part or phase* of the experiences themselves.¹⁰⁶

The pure self must remain unaffected by its acts, so as to remain the *same* through the contingencies of various experiences and thoughts. Actions, feelings and perceptions are empirical experienceable events; the pure

¹⁰⁵ Husserl 1900/II/1, p. 361. Translation by J.N. Findlay 1970, in *Logical investigations I*, Routledge & Keegan Paul 1976, p. 549. This note might be read as a direct comment on Strawson's mentalistic position

¹⁰⁶ Husserl 1913, p. 109, §57 Translated by W. R. Boyce Gibson, in *Ideas – general introduction to pure phenomenology*, George Allen and Unwin, Humanities Press 1976, p. 172.

self, even if it is included in each percept, does not participate as a true part of each percept, which is why it is possible for Husserl to claim phenomenological viability for the pure self; the pure self penetrates the empirical self (all intentional acts) and is as such a “transcendence in immanence”.¹⁰⁷

We have already mentioned how the pure self has several functions to fulfil in both philosophical and mystical literature. As such, it has also been at the centre of controversy in theological discussions, a conflict between mystical interpretations of the notion of the self and the orthodox views of the major world religions. Although we save the discussion concerning the relationship between mysticism and religion for the next section, we can here indicate that our position implies that each mystical/religious phenomenon/experience can be given both a ‘mystical’ interpretation and an ‘orthodox’ (or ‘lawful’) interpretation. When framed in terms of this understanding, Katz’s argument is that we should interpret mystical/religious phenomena in an ‘orthodox’ fashion, i.e. that the ‘laws’ of religion also apply to the mystics in the respective tradition; his perennialists opponents, on the other hand, argue that a mystical interpretation should be given to experiences and phenomena that are related to *both* religious and secular contexts, and that mystics quite often go beyond the traditional beliefs of their religious traditions. It is a conflict with epistemological and methodological dimensions, and if this implies that we see mysticism as a ‘method’ or a ‘theory of interpretation’, it does not conflict with the rest of our position concerning mysticism. While these issues are discussed further ahead, we shall here briefly indicate how the notion of the pure self can be interpreted in either a ‘mystical’ or an ‘orthodox’ fashion.

In orthodox interpretations of the Christian tradition, the pure self is interpreted as a personal soul, while in the usage of many Christian mystics the pure self becomes God. (This also seems true of the relation between the orthodox Islamic religionist and the Sufi, as the Sufi, by experiencing and becoming One with God, threatens the exclusiveness, externality and ‘wholly otherness’ of God.) We take a couple of examples

¹⁰⁷ Husserl 1913, p. 110, §57

from the Christian tradition to illustrate what is meant by this, starting with Eckhart:

For it is of the very essence of the soul that she is powerless to plumb the depths of her creator. And here one cannot speak of the soul any more, for she has lost her nature yonder in the oneness of divine essence. There she is no more called soul, but is called immeasurable being.¹⁰⁸

And St. Catherine of Genoa:

My Me is God, nor do I recognize any other Me except my God himself.¹⁰⁹

It is obvious that such views carry the potential of becoming major sources of theological conflict within a given tradition. From an orthodox theological perspective (of whatever traditional religion) it is madness to think that either the pure self or the empirical self is God. In the Christian tradition the merging of self with God has been termed “mystic union”. In secular context, reports of ‘a feeling of unity’ (with Ultimate Being, Nature, Universal Self, or whatever) are consequently treated as ‘mystical’ by the perennial philosophers of mysticism. The ‘feeling of unity’ is, in fact, one of the phenomenal characteristics of mystical experience listed by Stace, and many philosophers of mysticism take this feeling to be the primary sign that the experience has been ‘mystical’.¹¹⁰ The logic of the pure self does not permit it to be individuated in the manner of the empirical self. Without properties and instantiation the pure self of one mystic becomes the pure self of another, which is the *same* (meaning ‘identical’ or ‘one’, not similar in sharing the same properties) pure self that all men have a part of or have empirical selves as instantiations of. If the empirical self is the sum of all thoughts and experiences that constitute it, and that are the foundation

¹⁰⁸ Eckhart quoted from Huxley 1945, p. 12. The first chapter in Huxley’s *Perennial Philosophy* is a rich source of quotations on the issue of the ‘self’ in relation to God.

¹⁰⁹ St. Catherine of Genoa quoted from Huxley 1945, p. 11.

¹¹⁰ See for instance Ralph Hood’s and Nelson Pike’s accounts. In Hood 2001, p. 3 (the article is titled “Conceptual criticisms of regressive explanations of mysticism”), Hood writes: “...it is the consensus among investigators of both Eastern and Western mysticism that an experience of unity is, in fact, the major defining characteristic of mysticism.” In the introduction to his *Mystic Union* Nelson Pike refers to this same characteristic.

for new experiences and their interpretation, is it then possible to have experiences without the empirical self? Is it at all possible to get rid of (or bracket, or suspend) the qualities of the empirical self – all the thoughts and memories of experiences, all the intentional acts that constitute it? If it is possible, will there be a pure self that survives the death of the empirical self, or is there merely Nothingness?

1.3.5. Katz and the idea of a pure self

The questions just raised are not questions we intend to answer here, since answering them implies a number of metaphysical considerations and discussions that we have excluded by applying the phenomenological reduction. They are nonetheless of relevance here because by classifying various possible answers we hope to make a characterization of mysticism possible and also to improve our understanding of Katz's position on these matters. The phenomenological reduction might prevent us from engaging in metaphysics, but it does not stop us from discussing, analysing and comparing metaphysical systems (without determining the truth or falsehood of any particular one), since these systems are also a part of how an experience is interpreted. In this context, the focus will be on the semantic possibilities of the pure self. The denial of the existence of consciousness, pure self, God, and other empirically unobservable entities is certainly a part of some metaphysical system, and we will have to ask how Katz's system of interpretation should be categorized in this respect. If the type of experience known as 'mystic union', which is often connected to the metaphysics of the pure self, is also intimately related to different accounts of 'pure experience', what does Katz mean by "there are NO pure experiences"? Does he mean that he does not believe in the metaphysical reality of the pure self? If 'yes', then how does this affect Katz's theory of interpretation with respect to our evaluative criteria? If 'no', we may ask what Katz considers to be the nature and function of such a 'pure' self. Is it a 'thing' like the 'soul' (qualitatively personal, instantiated), or is it more like the Universal Self of the mystics? If Katz has an agnostic attitude on these issues, then on what grounds does he support the assumption that there are no pure

experiences?¹¹¹ All we know thus far is that Katz definitely denies the possibility of pure experience. And our aim is to find a reasonable explanation of what this might mean by comparing different possible interpretations and their general logical implications.

Another of Katz's arguments leads us to conclude that Katz's theory implies the non-existence of the pure self. It is his rejection of the possibility of suspending one's existential judgements and entering into a non-interpretive state that is nevertheless experiential. Such a view is made plain in his opposition to Robert Forman, who claims the existence of a pure consciousness event (PCE) defined as "a wakeful but content-less (non intentional) experience."¹¹² Forman claims to have reached this state after many years of transcendental meditation, a method that can be described, in Arthur Deikman's terms, as a process of "deautomatization".¹¹³ Deautomatization implies that the interpretive pattern of the subject is successively reduced to different levels of intensity. For a Pure Consciousness Event, we assume it must be reduced to zero, as is indicated by Forman's "non-intentional" and "content-less" experience. Katz, on the other hand, argues that this description of what happens to mystics is inaccurate, and that rather than *deconditioning* or *unconditioning* consciousness they (the mystics) are *reconditioning* consciousness.¹¹⁴ This means that their interpretive pattern is not undone but merely altered – exchanged for another interpretive pattern.

The general technique indicated by Forman's account – which resembles the phenomenological reduction and is performed in a variety of ways – is understood in the perennial and mystical interpretations of experience as the universal means of reaching 'enlightenment', meaning insight into a universal truth (be it of God's nature, human nature or the nature of

¹¹¹ Katz claims that it is because of the way human beings are (Katz 1978a, p. 26) that there are no pure experiences, but to us it seems that this is a metaphysical claim with no argumentative value whatsoever. As such it cannot support an assumption of the kind made by Katz.

¹¹² Forman 1999a, p. 367 (In *Models of the self* 1999), Forman describes PCE as "encounters with consciousness devoid of intentional content"

¹¹³ See Deikman 1973 (1966)

¹¹⁴ Katz 1978a, p. 57. We discuss the details of this further in chapter four.

Nature). These 'methods' to achieve illuminative experiences are based on the principle that the empirical self is an obstacle to the acquisition of *universal* knowledge because it is contingent and limited. The empirical self (thoughts, experiences, feelings, etc.) needs to be extinguished in order to 'purely see' (realize, 'know') the true nature of things without presuppositions or prejudice. Thus one can understand how Katz's central epistemological assumption that "*there are NO pure (i.e. unmediated) experiences*",¹¹⁵ can be viewed by certain critics as a type of non-cognitivism concerning 'universal truths'.¹¹⁶

The fact that the above mentioned 'methods' may take different shapes under different contextual circumstances neither eliminates the similarities nor advances our discussion on the issues of concern here. As such this topic will not be pursued. What should be mentioned at this point is that certain *religious* contexts have certain requirements that must be met in order for a mystical experience to be accepted as genuine. Moreover, in some of the more orthodox of these religious contexts, one such requirement is that an experience must be 'given' in order to be regarded as 'pure'. In other words, in order for the mystical experience to be considered a genuine experience of God, no sort of manipulation of the 'self' must be involved as an aid. In these religious traditions, or religious interpretive patterns, mystical experiences are *accepted* as 'genuine' if and only if they occur spontaneously and are not induced or assisted by such 'external' means as meditation, fasting, drugs and so forth. According to these traditions, the employment of these sorts of means raises the possibility that the state of the experiencer has been affected such that it may not be the Truth that characterizes the experience, but delusion and deception instead.

There are several indications that Katz holds some variation of this view (see chapters four and five); in light of this, how are we to understand the assumption that there are no pure experiences? Can it be interpreted as meaning that there are no 'genuine' mystical experiences? If this interpretation is correct, it would seem that such a conclusion would be more applicable in a theological or metaphysical context rather than one

¹¹⁵ Katz 1978a, p. 26.

¹¹⁶ See chapter two on criticisms against Katz's position.

that is strictly philosophical. In this regard, we have already discussed how interpreting a certain phenomenon through the lens of a specific metaphysical pattern may limit one's understanding of that phenomenon (see section 1.2). Taken to its maximum level of absurdity, such an approach can lead to an outright denial of the validity of the phenomenon in question – in this case, mystical experience.

The issue of the pure self as seen through a 'mystical' model of interpretation indicates the direction to be taken in understanding the totality of Katz's approach. Katz is explicit about being against the perennial *interpretations* of mystical experiences, not the experiences themselves. Even before introducing his epistemological assumption, he declares that "There is no *philosophia perennis*, Huxley and many others notwithstanding".¹¹⁷ Here Katz refers to what he interprets as Huxley's idea that there is a "common denominator among peoples of diverse religious backgrounds", which Katz classifies as an "ecumenical desire" associated with missionary activity.¹¹⁸ The following is a comparison between Katz's interpretation of the Buddhist experience of 'nothingness' and Huxley's interpretation of the Buddha's notion of pure self. While Katz's views are not explicit when it comes to the perennialists' unorthodox interpretations of the primitive self as something Universal, his orthodoxy is explicitly manifest in the selection of interpretations he uses to exemplify the truth of his theory. We start with Katz's comparative analysis of the Buddhist search for Nirvana:

...when the Jewish mystic performs his special mystical devotions and meditations, *kavanot*, he does so in order to purify his soul, i.e. to remove the soul from its entrapment in the material world in order to liberate it for its upward spiritual ascent culminating in *devekuth*, adhesion to God's emanations, the *Sefirot*. The Buddhist mystic, on the other hand, performs his meditative practices as an integral part of the Buddhist mystical quest, not in order to free the soul from the body and purify it, but rather in order to annihilate suffering by overcoming any notion of a substantial 'self' or 'soul' is the essential illusion which generates the entire process of suffering. Buddhist literature specifically represents the Buddha as criticising the belief in a permanent or substantial self (the Hindu doctrine of *atman*) as a false, even pernicious, doctrine which,

¹¹⁷ Katz 1978a, p. 24.

¹¹⁸ Katz 1978a, p. 24.

paradoxically, in so far as it encourages egoism in one's pursuit of one's own eternal happiness, makes the fulfilment of one's happiness an impossibility.¹¹⁹

Here Katz describes the general features of Buddhism – the doctrinal orthodox Buddhist traits that mark Buddhism as being distinct from other religious traditions – and designates them as “the Buddhist mystical quest”. Katz’s remark that “there is no *philosophia perennis*, Huxley...” is a direct challenge to Huxley’s perennialists-like interpretations, an example of which follows:

I am not competent, nor is this the place to discuss the doctrinal differences between Buddhism and Hinduism. Let it suffice to point out that, when he insisted that human beings are by nature “non-Atman,” the Buddha was evidently speaking about the personal self not the universal Self. The Brahman controversialists, who appear in certain of the Pali scriptures, never so much as mention the Vedanta doctrine of the identity of the Atman and Godhead and the non-identity of ego and Atman. What they maintain and Gautama denies is the substantial nature and eternal persistence of the individual psyche. “As an unintelligent man seeks for the abode of music in the body of the lute, so does he look for a soul within the *skandhas* (the material and psychic aggregates, of which the individual mind-body is composed).” About the existence of the Atman that is Brahman, as about most other metaphysical matters, the Buddha declines to speak, on the ground that such discussions do not tend to edification or spiritual progress among the members of the monastic order, such as he had founded.¹²⁰

Here we are shown that two separate interpretations are made within Buddhism, depending on what is meant by *anatman* (*anatta* in Pali-scriptures). If the *atman* is the ‘personal’ (or empirical) ‘self’, then realization of its non-existence may lead to the identification of the primitive self with the Universal Self (as in Shankara’s interpretation of the Upanishads), or it may lead to a realization of what is called the ‘Buddha nature’ in Mahayana Buddhist *sutras*. This type of interpretation

¹¹⁹ Katz 1978a, pp. 38-9.

¹²⁰ Huxley 1945, p. 9.

would be inaccurate according to Katz, and so he pleads for the recognition of differences.¹²¹

We continue our investigation by examining the meanings that might be ascribed to the notion of pure experience, comparing different alternatives and possibilities that could potentially match Katz's intentions. Thus far we can note that by not drawing a distinction between the empirical self and the primitive self, Katz's model of interpretation cannot include certain phenomena that mystics and others claim to be mystical, a pattern that can eventually lead to a complete denial of the possibility of mystical experience.

1.3.6. The notions of Pure Experience

Relative to his statement that "there are NO pure (unmediated) experiences", Katz neither explicitly defines the term 'experience' nor indicates exactly what is being denied – whether it be 'self', 'pure consciousness' or another such thing. In answering my question on this point, Katz's indicated that he is denying the possibility of attaining

...a direct form of knowledge of 'the thing in itself' without any conceptual (or other) mediation¹²²

The idea that a 'pure' experience is an 'unmediated' experience is one that Katz presents in "Language, epistemology, and mysticism" (1978). In this regard, his understanding of 'mediation' appears to approximate our understanding of 'intentionality', with an unmediated experience being as impossible as a non-intentional one. As previously noted, Katz sees intentionality as characterizing all experiences and explicates the

¹²¹ Katz 1978a, p. 25: "... the phenomenological typologies of Stace and Zaehner are too reductive and inflexible, forcing multifarious and extremely variegated forms of mystical experience into improper interpretative categories which lose sight of the fundamentally important differences between the data studied. In this sense it might even be said that this entire paper is a 'plea for the recognition of differences'."

¹²² See A3 in section 2.2. The question was: "What exactly is intended by the expression 'pure/unmediated experience'? In the article from 1978 there are several expressions used for this 'phenomenon', among which 'the given' is one. Is the notion of 'unmediated/pure experience' to be understood as 'the given' of phenomenology as well as the 'intuited' knowledge of Lao Tsu? And is the *Erfahrung* without *Erlebnis* of Kant, as well as 'the original flux' of James also included in the denial?"

term with reference to the language of mystics. Katz thus regards intensional expressions such as ‘expects’, ‘believes’, ‘hopes’, ‘looks for’, etc. as indicating that in experience intentional acts contain “an object in themselves”.¹²³ As it turns out, however, in Katz’s philosophy, the objects he refers to are not ‘intentional objects’, at least not as we have defined the term; rather they are either *real* objects or *irreal* objects interchangeably. Moreover, it seems that even if the reference of ‘intentional object’ is unclear (i.e. if it is real or irreal objects that the mystics encounter in their necessarily object-containing experiences), the ‘irreal’ objects may or may not correspond to some ‘real’ object – a position not very unusual or unreasonable to hold. We return to this issue in chapter three.

Since Katz considers intentionality to be such that an intentional act contains an object in itself, we must conclude that in his account there cannot be an intentional experience that is not also containing an object. Moreover, the quotation above seems to suggest that this relation is reflexive – i.e., that there cannot be an experience containing objects that is not also intentional. From this it is likely not overreaching to identify the “thing in itself” in Katz’s formulation with a real object, and “mediated” with intentionality in the psychological sense (to ‘seek’, ‘hope’, ‘desire’, etc). As a common epistemological consideration, denying the possibility of attaining “...a direct form of knowledge of ‘the thing in itself’ without any conceptual (or other) mediation” seems to be denying the possibility of ‘knowing’ a real object without involving conceptual or other forms of intentionality. This is insufficient for two reasons: 1) to our knowledge, no serious philosopher has affirmed the possibility of knowing the ‘thing in itself’ without some form of mediation. Katz’s denial is thus not unique, but rather a general epistemological consideration that can generate various analyses of experience and is thus insufficient in terms of narrowing down the specific character of Katz’s point of view; and, 2) it is difficult to see what this formulation has to do with mysticism and mystical experience, or what effect it would have on the interpretation of mystical experience reports. In light of this, Katz’s claim seems to be merely contradicting

¹²³ Katz 1978a, p. 63.

the perennialist claim that it is possible for the mystics to attain a state of consciousness which does not involve a conceptual form of understanding, like for instance Robert Forman's claim of a Pure Consciousness Event.¹²⁴ Our intent is to understand what the denial of pure experience means in Katz's theory, and how it can be said to explicate or otherwise advance our understanding of mysticism and mystical experience. Katz presents the denial of 'pure experience' as a central point of departure relative to understanding mystical experience and mystical experience reports. However, since this same proposition appears to undermine the possibility of doing just that, we examine different conceptualizations of 'pure experience' and compare them with Katz's position. By this we hope to gain a firmer understanding of the implications of Katz's denial.

In section 1.3.4 we discussed how an experience of the 'pure self' can be assimilated with the notion of 'mystical union' (found in mysticism research). We call this notion of 'pure experience' notion (α):

(α): The experience of the 'pure self' that in a perennial interpretation is a Universal Self, identical in all men (and that in an 'orthodox' or 'religious' interpretation can be termed Buddha Nature, God, etc.), and for which 'mystic union' is an appropriate description. Experiences of this type are said to be achieved

¹²⁴ The PCE is not a claim of knowing the 'thing in itself', though what exact 'knowledge' that may result from such an event (if at all possible) remains to be evaluated. In his article "Mystical knowledge" Robert Forman argues that it is "knowledge by identity", and the known 'object' is consciousness (the 'pure self'). Unless Katz wishes to claim that consciousness is a "thing in itself", all that remains to contradict here is the idea of non-conceptuality. Katz would not be alone in upholding the position that it is impossible to have non-conceptual experiences (resulting in some form of 'tacit knowledge' – see for instance Husserl in *Cartesian Meditations* 1977, §16), though this is a matter worthy of discussion in itself, which is impossible if there is no argument except the 'fact' that this is "the sorts of beings we are" (Katz 1978a, p. 26). Should we accept the argument that mystical experience is conditioned by beliefs as an argument supporting the claim that there are no pure experiences, we are still no better off than without this argument. Katz provides his 'evidence' that experience is conditioned by beliefs by making a case of the differences between religious traditions. However, the differences between religious traditions cannot support the claim that the experiences of mystics are not unmediated by these different interpretive patterns.

through a suspension, by whatever means, of the empirical qualities of the empirical self.

In secular contexts this type of experience need not be described as a unification with a universal principle, and although we do not discuss Forman's metaphysical position on the nature of this "consciousness devoid of intentional content", his PCE would seem to belong to this class of experiences in that it is "a wakeful but content-less (non intentional) experience."¹²⁵

We have moreover noted that mystical experiences that have been called 'genuine' because of their acclaimed non-facilitated 'givenness' can at times also be termed 'pure experience'. This criterion alone, however, is not sufficient to constitute a category of 'pure experience'. This is partly because it is difficult to ascertain whether or not a given experience has been in some way facilitated or induced by a source other than the accepted divine one, and partly because even if this problem were overcome there is still no way of guaranteeing that the experience was 'pure' in the sense of not being affected by the expectations and interpretive pattern of the experiencer. This is also the precise point of proponents of 'pure experience': if the conceptual and expectational features are not set aside, any component of the experience is tainted by the pre-experiential cognitive foundation through which experience is made meaningful. If this cognitive foundation (or interpretive pattern) of the experiencer cannot be 'undone' or temporarily 'inactivated', the experience can never be 'pure' in the sense that it is non-conceptual or non-intentional. So whether the experience is of God, Allah or Nirvana, as long as the pre-experiential cognitive foundation has not been erased, or at least diminished, neither God nor Allah nor Nirvana is experienced 'purely'.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Forman 1999a, p. 367.

¹²⁶ Katz considers this requirement to be complementary to the view that experience can be facilitated. In Katz's view, "language creates, when used by the mystical adept ... the operative processes through which the essential epistemic channels that permit mystical forms of knowing and being are made accessible" (Katz 1992a, p. 8). To this he adds in a note that facilitation "is to be understood as one way of coming to mystical knowledge or experience; that is, the knower actively seeks to alter his consciousness in order to facilitate the desired nonordinary experience. This approach is neither

Two points of controversy are involved in this. The first is the matter of how this affects the interpretation of mystical experience reports. One way of understanding Katz's denial of pure experience is as a two-part argument: first, the experiences of mystics are not considered pure because they are mediated; second, whatever the 'given' may be in their experience, it is impossible to distinguish from the content that is what it is because of the interpretation imposed by the experiencer in his or her report. The first part of this argument includes the tacit presumption that mystics are not factually able to undo or set aside their interpretive pattern, an issue that Katz explicitly addresses when discussing the notion of 'unconditioning' (shortly to be examined). The second part of the argument constitutes the main challenge to the perennial claim that in a 'mixed' report it is possible to distinguish those elements that are part of the experiencer's interpretive pattern from those that are 'purely' given. Specifically challenged by this argument are the claims that mystical experiences contain experiential similarities that transcend cultural and religious boundaries, and that the phenomenal characteristics listed by James, Stace and others represent the identificational criteria for mystical experience. This issue will be discussed more thoroughly in chapter three.

The second point of controversy arising from the issue of pure experience and its relation to 'givenness' concerns the general question of how this enhances our understanding of the phenomenon of mystical experience. At times Katz seems to equate the 'given' with 'pure

universal nor is it to be taken as the only approach found in the mystical traditions of the world. It is complemented (not contradicted) by an alternative position that views mystical experience as an act of God or the transcendent that requires no prior or technical preparation, and that explains the specialness of such experience by reference to the specialness of the *object* of such experience – for example, Allah or Brahman" (Katz 1992a, p. 35, n. 12). At first, the position which "views mystical experience as an act of God" seems to be an affirmation of the position that there can be pure (or 'given') experiences, but the rest of the sentence implies that the 'specialness' of the experience is that it came from a 'special object', which does not exclude the idea that these 'special objects' (Allah and Brahman) can only be experienced through the mediational processes of the knower. So these experiences cannot be said to be 'pure', even if their source is a 'special object' – which it *necessarily* is in Katz's philosophy, as we soon will see.

experience',¹²⁷ but if we consider what has been said above, it seems that mystical experiences (in theoretical accounts) can be either 'pure' and 'given' or 'given' but not pure, indicating that 'givenness' and 'purity' should be considered as separate possible attributes of an experience. When 'givenness' and 'purity' are equated, the possibility of 'given' experience vanishes along with the possibility of 'pure' experience, leading to the negation of the possibility of mystical experience altogether, even of the type "that views mystical experience as an act of God or the transcendent that requires no prior or technical preparation"¹²⁸ – Katz's own alternative to the view that mystical experience is facilitated. Katz clearly considers language and the religious pre-experiential conditioning of the mystic to be some form of "technical preparation" (i.e., facilitation); this leads one to question how much of an alternative Katz's alternative really is. Should Katz then be understood as saying that experiences 'given' by an act of the divine also require conceptual preparation? This view appears to be confirmed in his statement that "[a]ll 'givens' are also the product of the process of 'choosing', 'shaping', and 'receiving'. That is, the 'given' is appropriated through acts which shape it into forms which we can make intelligible to ourselves given our conceptual constitution".¹²⁹ Or should he be understood as meaning that these particular types of experiences – i.e., the ones 'given' by an act of the divine – do not require a conceptual component? If this is indeed what he means, the statement appears to lead back to the understanding that such experiences are, in a sense, 'pure'? Unfortunately, without more information about Katz's notion of pure experience and how it relates to other conceptions of pure experience, it is difficult to derive definitive answers to these questions.

If we take Katz's description of 'pure experience' as "...a direct form of knowledge of 'the thing in itself' without any conceptual (or other)

¹²⁷ See, for instance, Katz 1978a, p. 59: "Closely allied to the erroneous contention that we can achieve a state of pure consciousness is the oft used notion of the 'given' or the 'suchness' or the 'real' to describe the pure state of mystical experience which transcends all contextual epistemological colourings."

¹²⁸ Katz 1992a, p. 35, n. 12.

¹²⁹ Katz 1978, p. 59.

mediation”¹³⁰ and attempt to interpret this in terms that are familiar to us, “form of knowledge of ‘the thing in itself’” becomes ‘objective knowledge’ and “without any conceptual (or other) mediation” becomes ‘non-intentional experience’. When viewed in the light of this interpretation, Katz appears to be negating *the possibility of an objective yet non-intentional experience*, in which the objects, more specifically, are real objects. In our understanding this amounts to a rejection of the position that experiential content is given to consciousness in a “direct” manner. In other words, Katz rejects the notion that the real objects that we interact with in ordinary experience are somehow ‘imprinted’ on a blank mind (a *tabula rasa* perhaps),¹³¹ and, as such, are objectively ‘known’ by a passive receiver. Although it is difficult to find examples of such experiences in the mystical literature (perhaps one is the epistemology in some interpretations of the concept of ‘revelation’) we will try to form a description of the notion of pure experience that Katz refers to. We call this notion (β):

(β): A non-mediated (non-intentional) experience of a real object.

This has more the character of an *interpretation* of experience, or an epistemological *aspect* of experience in general. Any experience can be interpreted as mediated or unmediated, and the interpretation depends more on the epistemological model being applied than on the type of objects being ‘given’. Although for Katz the possibility of having a mystical experience without an object is also nil, which is why he denies the possibility of Forman’s PCE:

...the pure consciousness event is not without content. If it *is* without content ... then we couldn’t deal with it. But the fact that we can call it “pure consciousness” and talk about it, and treat it in texts, and compare it to other things means that it has to have some content to it.¹³²

The idea that anything that can be talked about necessarily has a content (an object, in Katz’s account) is a very strong suggestion even for ordinary types of experience, especially if we have two types of objects to

¹³⁰ See A3 in chapter two.

¹³¹ See Katz in Katz 1978a, p. 59.

¹³² Katz quoted by Gregory from the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion 2000, Mysticism Group. In Gregory 2006, p. 148.

deal with. On the one hand, we have experiences that lack real objects. In dreams, for example, we are acquainted with sincere intentional attitudes towards ‘objects’, irrespective of whether they ‘really’ exist or are adequate representations of a natural environment; the same can be said of hallucinations, mirages and other such experiences. On the other hand, we find experiences that have neither real nor unreal objects – what we can call non-directed attitudes. Feelings of ecstasy, anxiety, unity and holiness belong to this class, as would the feeling of a presence without someone being present, of a fear that has no object, etc.

The identification of ‘pure experience’ with an intentional but object-less experience can be interpreted as the non-mediated (non-intentional) experience of a real object (β above), but it can also be interpreted as either:

(γ): Experiences that do not have real objects, but only unreal objects that do not accurately represent reality. These would include dreams, mirages, hallucinations, deceptive perception, imaginary thinking, etc.; or,

(δ): Experiences that have neither real nor unreal objects. These would include ‘purely’ intentional experiences such as anxiety and ecstasy, but also such feelings as ‘restlessness’ that do not appear to have ‘objects’, despite the fact that they are distinct ‘feelings’ or ‘states’ of the self.

These ways of viewing experiences are based on a naturalistic ontology (which is presupposed by the real object); accordingly, the experiences are generally classified as subjective, internal and non-cognitive. With reference to (γ), the importance of finding a viable means of differentiating between deceptive and cognitive experiences has been emphasised by many authors on mysticism and mystical experiences, and also by mystics who, of course, do not want their experiences classified according to naturalistic standards. With reference to (δ), one might assume that Katz means that even experiences of this type – of which Forman’s PCE could be one – have a ‘content’ in that they have a ‘name’. If I am ‘restless’, then ‘restlessness’ is the object or content of my experience, and if I have a ‘pure experience’, then ‘pure experience’ (or ‘purity’) is the object or content of my experience. The problem with this

is that ‘acts’ and ‘non-acts’ must also be ‘contents’ or ‘objects’, and it becomes impossible to distinguish the constitutional process from its result. Moreover, if experiences are to be classified systematically according to ‘object’, then the classification of a ‘pure experience’ as an ‘objective’ experience (since we *do* seem to be talking about it) should be a natural consequence.

Neither the notions (γ) nor (δ) are explicitly denied by Katz. Why, then, in Katz’s system of classification, should we not classify claimed ‘pure experiences’ according to what they are claimed to be; why should such experiences be considered either non-existent or misconceived by the experiencer?

We could easily continue our analysis of the many different notions of ‘pure experience’ that are commonly found in mystical writings. However, as interesting as this might be, we have basically reached the limits of what Katz’s theory and conceptual set permit. It is hoped that the above described clarifications will suffice for our forthcoming analysis. Before discussing the relation between mysticism and religion, which continues our discussion concerning Katz’s position on ‘pure’ experience, we briefly examine another set of concepts that play a central role in Katz’s philosophy of mysticism: ‘sameness’ and ‘difference’.

1.3.7. Sameness and difference

A central point in Katz’s philosophy is that mystical experiences are *different* in character, and not the *same* or *similar* as perennial interpreters assume. Katz considers this an important point and insists that we should consider his article “Language, epistemology, and mysticism” as a plea for the recognition of such differences.¹³³ We briefly mentioned the idea that the identity of real objects is determined by the foundational material that occupies a certain limited area of space and cannot simultaneously occupy the same area as another real object. Real objects that satisfy the above requirement are said to be *identical* to themselves. The reality of these objects is assured by their independence of other objects and their spatio-temporal restrictions. The same (identical) real

¹³³ Katz 1978a, p. 25.

object can be experienced by many persons at the same time and by one person at different times, and is independent of the phenomenal difference by which it is 'known' to different persons and/or to the same person at different times. Although we do not intend to develop a metaphysics of real objects, we do intend to understand what Katz means by his plea for the recognition of differences. And since Katz seems to mean that it is the 'object' (the real object, we may conclude) that determines the type of experience had, it may at times be inevitable to involve metaphysical considerations. We are still applying the *epoché*, however, so none of our assertions should be taken as affirming (or negating) the independent reality of objects; rather they should be taken as considerations on the logic of metaphysical thinking.

Concerning the metaphysics of the pure self, we have said that a property-less entity (which the 'pure self' can be viewed as) with no particular spatio-temporal location is indistinguishable from other such 'entities', and is to be viewed as *one* 'object' (essence, principle, substance, etc). Objects that lack spatio-temporal determination are difficult to individuate intersubjectively, as the Scolastics experienced in their debate on particulars and universals and as we have noted with regard to the *noema* of intentional acts. Without spatio-temporal relational properties, the objective reality (and individuality) of any claimed essence is questionable. Likewise, the reality of any phenomenal object (in cases where they are identified as irreal objects) can be questioned. As we will discuss in chapter five (and shall already see in chapter two), Katz claims some form of verificationism for the objectivity of experience, and also some form of possible realism for the 'realities' encountered in the experiences of mystics. This realism implies that the objects encountered in mystical experiences are possible real objects.¹³⁴ The descriptions of the mystics, then, mirror the mystic's (possible) encounter with a real object, which in its own terms has a metaphysical individuality and

¹³⁴ We also leave for later, the discussion of how Katz can claim possible realism for the experiences of mystics after initially asserting that the mystical experience is not verifiable. This point is of considerable weight, since it is the foundation for Katz's assertion that mystical claims are irrelevant in establishing the "truth or falsity of religion in general" (Katz 1978a, p. 22). How this should be weighed (or measured) in relation to Katz's realism is not clear at all.

independence; and this object, if the encounter is factual (a *real* relation between two independent entities), is what individuates and characterizes the specific experience that the mystic reports. This interpretation of Katz's position – i.e., that the object of experience is characterizing the experience – is supported by Katz's insistence that the object of experience makes the experience what it is, his major argument against the perennialist claim of similarities in experiential quality. For Katz, if the experiences of mystics have different objects, the experiences are different.

In a natural spatio-temporal reality, if two individual objects are experienced as being *similar*, they share certain phenomenal properties. If they share *all* phenomenal properties (like two identical reproductions of the Mona Lisa) they are individuated by their relational properties.¹³⁵ If the experiences are characterized by their objects, which is how Katz suggests that experiences should be characterized, then two experiences are the '*same*' or '*similar*'¹³⁶ if they share the common property of having had an encounter (sRo) with the '*same*' or '*identical*' real object.¹³⁷ It is thus

¹³⁵ The relational properties can only be the 'same' in an empty space where nothing exists except the two objects, and, as Ivar Segelberg discusses in *Begreppet egenskap*, if they are not two perfect spheres, they must be mirror-faced in order to share all real (relational) properties. This, of course, is not the place for an extended discussion on this matter. Interested readers are referred to Segelberg's *Properties*, in English translation by Herbert Hochberg, published at Thales, Library of Theoria No 25, 1999. We also recommend Hochberg's *Complexes and consciousness*, in which Segelberg's philosophy receives a thorough analysis (at Thales, Library of Theoria No 26, 1999).

¹³⁶ Unfortunately, as we shall see many examples of in chapter two, Katz never distinguishes between 'sameness' and 'similarity' when discussing the idea of common features in the experiences of mystics from different religious backgrounds. When pleading for the recognition of differences, Katz rejects both the idea that two cross-traditional experiences can be the 'same' (which does not make sense, since no two experiences can be said to be numerically identical even if had by the same person and are of the same object), and the idea that there are similar characteristics in the experiences of mystics from different traditional backgrounds (which is the main point of controversy between Katz and common-core theorists).

¹³⁷ Katz writes: "...mystics and students of mysticism have to recognize that mystical experience is not (putatively) solely the product of the conditioned act of experience as constituted from the side of the experiencer, but is also constituted and conditioned by what the *object* or 'state of affairs' is that the mystic (believes he) 'encounters' or experiences" (Katz 1978a, p. 64). This is a 'softer' formulation of Katz's position on the features of mystical experience, in which there appears to be room for a 'conditioning'

not the relational property of an experience that is the criteria of its individuation, but the objects to which it relates. A relational property like ‘looking for’ (which Katz discusses in terms of ‘intentional act’) is otherwise a generally excellent way of characterizing an experience, since it is ‘real’ or ‘the same’ independently of the elements of the relation. Whether I am looking for my keys or you are looking for my keys, or whether I am looking for your keys and you are looking for your pet, the relational act of ‘looking for’ is the universally *same* act – i.e., we are doing the same thing independently of who we are or what we are looking for. We would not say that if you are looking for your keys and I am looking for my pet, then we have had different experiences. Katz does not say that one experience of Allah is the *same* as another experience of Allah, but neither does he say that they are *different* in the same way that one’s experience of Allah is different from another one’s experience of the Christian God.

As will be discussed in chapter three, this is the major source of conflict between Katz and the perennialists. Katz’s criteria of ‘sameness’ are not in keeping with the criteria of the perennialists who claim, contrary to Katz, that there can be *similar* experiences across religious borders. According to Katz’s criteria of individuation, the Muslim experiences Allah, the Buddhist experiences Nirvana and the Christian experiences God. In his view, this fact makes Allah, Nirvana and God different (although not necessarily spatio-temporal) ‘objects’ that may or may not be encountered by the mystic; when encountered, however, such ‘objects’ shape the mystic’s experience into what it is.

Perennial interpreters also often seem to claim that there need not be an object in a given mystical experience (just as there need not be an object in a given feeling of restlessness, anxiety, despair, ecstasy, etc.). Because of this they believe that an experience is best classified according to its

on the part of the experiencer. However, taken together with the “plea for the recognition of differences”, in which it is implied that if one mystic experiences Allah and the other experiences God they have *different* experiences (even if both experiences are transcendent, unitive, joyful, etc.), the object of experience gains primacy over the phenomenal characteristics as an individuator of the experience. Adding Katz’s (possible) realism to the equation results in a real object partly determining an experience to the extent that it determines what type of experience the experience is.

phenomenal characteristics. If the experiences have the same or similar *qualitative* (as opposed to relational) properties they are characterized as similar, and it is not considered necessary to make metaphysical assertions as to whether they are the ‘same’ in the sense that they constitute a single universal experience, or whether the qualities of the experience stem from a universal quality-source or from the particular instantiations of experienced quality. Part of Katz’s criticism against this is that the phenomenal characteristics listed by perennialists are too general to outline mystical experiences:

That is to say, what appears to be similar-sounding descriptions are not similar descriptions and do *not* indicate the same experience. They do not because language is itself contextual, and words ‘mean’ only in context. The same words – beautiful, sublime, ultimate reality, ineffable, paradoxical, joyful, transcending all empirical content, etc – can apply and have been applied to more than one object. Their mere presence alone does not guarantee anything; neither the nature of the experience nor the nature of the referent nor the comparability of various claims is assured by this seemingly common verbal presence alone.¹³⁸

One problem here seems to be that Katz does not distinguish between properties ascribed to an object and properties ascribed to an experience, whether of an object or not. It is difficult to see how “transcending all empirical content” can be the property of an object, or even how someone could claim that it is so. If one person considers Mona Lisa to be aesthetically attractive, while another finds her to be repulsive, what does it add to say that both persons have had an experience of the *same* ‘object’. Do both persons have the same experience when they experience DaVinci’s Mona Lisa? The two may completely agree on any given phenomenal description of the painting, the properties they ascribe their object may match to the last detail, yet the person considering the Mona Lisa to be attractive would never agree that he has had the *same* experience as the person considering her to be repulsive. In the process of categorizing experiences according to Katz’s criteria, one seems unable to account for many important qualitative features. Because repulsion and attraction are not natural qualities, their intersubjective demonstration can only be performed through the medium of language

¹³⁸ Katz 1978a, p 46

– a medium, it must be mentioned, that very much includes the reality of ‘repulsion’ and ‘attraction’ as general attitudes that, while perhaps identical in all men, are not empirically observable in the objects to which they are ascribed.

Even if one wants to classify experiences according to the objects they ‘contain’, similarity of experiences must be based on some typology of phenomenal properties, since their identification (not identity) is dependent on their phenomenal properties. This is the second argument against Katz’s apparent view that experiences should be categorized according to the objects they contain. The first argument concerned the criticism that such a view is reductive of certain aspects (and forms) of experience; the second concerns the challenge that in order to compare and classify experiences according to the real objects they ‘contain’ we would have to become professional metaphysicians with the capacity to identify all sorts of real objects and their relational properties. This seems a strange detour from the study of the experiences of mystics.

Chapter three will involve a more detailed discussion regarding the problems merely hinted at here, and how these problems affect Katz’s own interpretive pattern as he goes about the task of analysing and assessing mystical experience reports. This discussion, however, requires certain clarifications regarding Katz’s view on the relation between mysticism and religion. Katz’s primary reason for denying the ‘sameness’ of mystical experiences is that the mystic brings his religious ‘conditioning’ to the experience, and those ‘conditions’ (here, also, ‘objects’) are as different as the religions themselves. Thus we must ask: what is mysticism and what is religion according to Katz?

1.4. Mysticism and religion

The aim of this section is not to propose definitions for either “religion” or “mysticism”; rather, it is to examine the implicit assumption in Katz’s use of these two terms. This is important for several reasons. First there is the conflict between Katz and the perennialists concerning the characteristics of mystical experience, with Katz characterizing mystical experience by way of religion and the perennialists characterizing it by way of experience. Second, to understand what type of interpretation

Katz insists upon respecting reports of mystical experiences, one must look to religion, since religion is represented as the 'source' or 'origin' of such experiences in Katz's understanding. Thirdly, if, as Katz claims, mystical experience is largely informed by religion, one might ask what difference Katz sees between a mystical and a religious experience. Finally, Katz claims that although mystics have been generally portrayed as heretics and antinomians,¹³⁹ this picture ignores the fact that, for the most part, mystical experience preserves rather than contradicts religious doctrine, and is thus more a conservative than a 'revolutionary' phenomenon. Because of these considerations, it would seem necessary to examine what similarities and distinctions Katz draws between mysticism and religion. This will be done primarily by contrasting Katz's views on the relationship between religion and mysticism with those of the perennialists.

We begin by making a preliminary distinction between Religious Systems (e.g., Christianity, Hinduism) on the one hand, and Religious Persons (e.g., a Christian, a Hindu) on the other. In preceding sections the notion of a personal belief system, or interpretive pattern, has been discussed, and although we have not yet clarified the precise nature of a *religious* interpretive pattern, it would seem fair to say that a religious person is one with a religious interpretive pattern. The principle question in the point of conflict between Katz and the perennialists involves the relationship between 'religious persons' and the 'religious systems' to which they adhere. Religious systems contain doctrines and recommendations of practice for adherents (e.g., praying, reading sacred texts, participating in rituals, etc). If we were to identify a religious person as one who follows the rituals, strictures and practices of a specific religious system, this manner of identification would exclude the possibility of there being a religious person outside of any specific religious system. It appears that this is precisely what Katz does in the following description of mysticism:

¹³⁹ Katz 1983a, pp. 3-4.

... readers should treat the terms “mysticism” as a shorthand for a list of independent mystical traditions, Buddhist, Hindu, Sufi, Christian, Jewish, etc.¹⁴⁰

Mysticism thus appears to be not *one* thing – i.e., there is no common core – but many, and each mystical tradition is inseparably tied to a religious tradition, and notably “independent” of the other mystical traditions. It also seems that mysticism (or, at least, mystical experience) is a product of religion, and not the other way around:

Mystical experience(s) are the *result* of traversing the mystical way(s), whatever specific *way* one happens to follow, e.g. the Jewish, Sufi, or Buddhist. What one reads, learns, knows, intends, and experiences along the path creates to some degree (let us leave this somewhat vaguely stated as yet) the *anticipated* experience made manifest.¹⁴¹

Mystical experience is embedded within the religious context of the experiencer, and mystics experience the doctrines they have inherited from their traditions:

All these mystical personalities intended and experienced, they had *knowledge by acquaintance*, what their communities taught as *knowledge by description*. They had existential knowledge of what their co-religionists knew only through propositions.¹⁴²

‘Mystics’, then, are those who have *religious experiences* within a *religious system*. Islam, for example, is a religious system containing a particular ‘body of knowledge’ in the form of religious propositions; this body of knowledge to some degree informs Sufism, an Islamic mystical tradition, and thus helps to ‘create’ the “anticipated experience made manifest” in a given Sufi mystic. This type of understanding is the principal reason that Katz believes that a Muslim cannot experience the *same thing* as a Buddhist, a Christian or a Jew: since the religious traditions are *different* in character and each presents propositions with *different* content, the Muslim mystic experiences Allah, the Buddhist mystic experiences Nirvana, the Christian mystic experiences Jesus and the Jewish mystic experiences the Divine Throne. Thus it appears that, for Katz, a common characteristic of mystical experiences is that they are existential

¹⁴⁰ Katz 1983a, p. 51, n1

¹⁴¹ Katz 1983a, p. 6.

¹⁴² Katz 1983a, p. 21.

instantiations of the particular truths presented by the religious systems of which they are a part.

Katz's identification of mystics appears to be solely in terms of the religious tradition of which they are a part, seeming to exclude the possibility of mystics and mystical experiences that are unconnected to a particular religion. This is clearly a critical point, since several prominent authors on mysticism and mystical experience have included so-called 'nature experiences' – experiences that involve a sense of oneness or unity with nature – within the class of experiences they consider to be mystical. Apart from nature experiences, certain other experiences, known generally as 'altered states of consciousness', have been regularly referred to as 'mystical' by various interpreters of mysticism, mostly of the perennialist school.

The fact that Katz's notion of 'mystical' makes no room for experiences that lack traditional religious content may not be a strict problem. However, for those who believe that the study of such experiences contributes positively to our overall understanding of mystical experience, the removal of these data constitutes a loss, and thus represents a serious weakness in Katz's understanding.¹⁴³ This difference of opinion regarding what should and should not be included within the class of experiences known as mystical arises as a consequence of the fact that while perennialists identify a mystical experience in terms of the *phenomenal* characteristics of *experience*, Katz identifies a mystical experience in terms of the *religious object* – i.e., the '*object*' that mystics refer to when describing their experience. Although Katz provides no detailed discussion on this issue in any of his essays on mysticism, he gives some vague indications that the 'object' that the mystic experiences is the deity as described by respective religions. In a note concerning the facilitative aspects of mystical experience, Katz claims that a different "approach" can complement the picture:

...an alternative position that views mystical experience as an act of God or the transcendent that requires no prior or technical preparation, and

¹⁴³ Without such data it becomes exceedingly difficult to differentiate between those elements in a mystical experience report that are independent of a religious foundation and those that depend on the religious background of the experiencer.

that explains the specialness of such experience by reference to the specialness of the *object* of such experience – for example, Allah or Brahman.¹⁴⁴

The ‘specialness’ of these ‘objects’ may delimit mystical experience and help in distinguishing it from ordinary experience, but it does not help with respect to differentiating between mystical experience and religious experience. Katz initiates his investigation in “Language, epistemology, and mysticism” by stating that:

...in the final analysis, mystical or more generally religious experience is irrelevant in establishing the truth or falsity of religion in general or any specific religion in particular.¹⁴⁵

This statement implies that the class known as *mystical* experiences is subsumed within and/or distinct from the more general class known as *religious* experiences, and also indicates that ‘*religion in general*’ is in some way distinct from ‘*religion in particular*’. Katz seems to believe that the phrase ‘mystical tradition’ signifies those individuals who are merely experiencing and teaching others to experience the ‘*Truth*’ of their greater *religious* heritage. Given this, it is difficult to see how such an understanding can help in distinguishing between a mystical and a religious experience. The story is completely different in accounts where *experience* delimits mysticism, rather than *religious doctrine*. Ralph Hood, for example, identifies the common factor in mystical experiences as the ‘unitive’ experience, which, in his view, may be given either a religious or a non-religious interpretation:

...it seems reasonable to conclude that the M-scale identifies the report of a single core experience of mysticism ... with a joyful, religious interpretation possible ... This, of course, means that some religious experiences may in fact not be mystical and some mystical experiences may not be religious.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Katz 1992a, p. 35, n. 12

¹⁴⁵ Katz 1978a, p. 22.

¹⁴⁶ Hood 2001, p. 27. The M-scale (or Mysticism-scale) is based on Stace’s criteria of the phenomenal characteristics of mystical experience and measures the mysticism-factor in mystical and religious experience reports. Hood also recognizes that experience can be distinguished from interpretation: “...interpretation of experience can be separated from experience itself, even though, paradoxically, no experience is uninterpreted.” (in Hood 2001, p. 150.)

As can be seen from this quotation, Hood's view holds out the possibility for mystical experiences outside the traditional context of a religion, whereas Katz's account apparently does not. Katz's view appears to be that mysticism is some kind of a by-product of religious doctrine.

An implication of this point of view is that a heretic mystic would be an almost impossible phenomenon, since, for the most part, mystics experience – and report experiencing – according to the inherited truths of their religious tradition. Such an understanding, however, flies in the face of historical fact, since heresy among mystics is a genuine recorded occurrence. This would indicate that Katz's theory of interpretation can neither account for nor explain certain historical events. Katz, of course, does not deny that throughout history there have been contradictory views on religious issues, and that these have led to the persecution of several individuals, some of whom Katz would classify as 'mystics'. Nonetheless, the unmistakable emphasis of his approach has been on the 'conservative character of mystical experience'. In addition, and as a consequence of the strong connection he draws between mystical experiences and the religious traditions that have apparently shaped them, Katz would seem to consider heresy a type of illusion or misunderstanding. Otherwise, how could a mystical experience that is largely conditioned by the religious tradition to which a given mystic is connected, contradict or in other ways undermine the truths presented by that tradition?

From an historical perspective, it would seem that the relations between religious systems and religious experience have been rather turbulent and confrontational over time, and that, in the process, religious persons have often been victimized for their beliefs. The cross-cultural history of religion indicates that a religious system tends to classify adherents as either genuinely religious or heretical according to their degree of loyalty to that system's precepts and commandments. A genuinely religious person that has a profound experience which contradicts the basic 'truths' of her religious system is often faced with the difficult choice of either rejecting her experience and remaining a faithful follower of that system, or rejecting the standardized understandings of her tradition and

following the potentially heretical calling of her own experiences, especially as they relate to issues of ultimate concern. If that person decides upon the latter course, and begins to think, speak and act in ways that fundamentally conflict with the traditional understandings, behaviour and practices of her religion, then naturally she will appear as a threat to other adherents and be dealt with accordingly. In such a case, both she and her religious experience are in danger of being rejected because her experience has turned her *against* the fundamentals of the religious system.

In any religious system (as well as in any system, political or theoretical), then, there can be no acceptance of individual experiences that make people apt to question or criticise the basic laws of that system. If, for instance, a particular religious experience fosters the view that the experiencer's religious system insists upon certain precepts only to maintain worldly control over its adherents, this would certainly be viewed within the system as a heretical religious experience. An example of one such 'heresy' can be found in the realization of Bhuddahasa Bhikku, quoted below:

...one who has attained to the ultimate truth sees that there's no such thing as "religion." There is only a certain nature, which can be called whatever we like. We can call it "Dhamma," we can call it "Truth," we can call it "God," "Tao," or whatever, but we shouldn't particularize that Dhamma or that Truth as Buddhism, Christianity, Taoism, Judaism, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, or Islam, for we can neither capture nor confine it with labels and concepts. Still, such divisions occur because people haven't yet realized this nameless truth for themselves.¹⁴⁷

In 1885, Pope Leo XIII declared that "the equal toleration of all religions ... is the same thing as atheism".¹⁴⁸ What would he have made of Bhikku's statement? Probably that it was a heresy not only with respect to Catholicism, but with respect to religion in general. Indeed the realization of the "nameless truth" that Bhikku expresses is offensive to all religious systems that insist on the uniqueness of their own linguistic expressions of truth.

¹⁴⁷ Buddhadasa Bhikku (translated by Bhikku Punno); Speech given on 01/27/1964 at Suan Usom Foundation, Bangkok

¹⁴⁸ Pope Leo XIII; *Immortale Dei*, 1885

This type of ‘universalist’ thinking – i.e., thinking beyond the cultural, linguistic and religious determinants that comprise the contextual conditions of the thinker – is exactly what Katz’s “perennialists” have identified as the common core of religious experience, or rather as mysticism. And if the experience of this ‘nameless truth’ can cause the rejection of a religious system’s laws and beliefs, clearly it would be in the interest of preservationists to ban such experiences from the start, in the name of sustaining the social order. The conflict between religious systems and religious experiences is thus a struggle over religious persons. Or rather, the relation that a religious person chooses to have relative to religious systems and religious experiences respectively, is a means of identifying ‘genuine’ religiousness, and a means of differentiating between ‘spiritual religiousness’ and ‘ritual religious behaviour’. Whether or not a religious experience is in and of itself heretical is not the question. The term heresy derives its meaning not from the so-called ‘heretical’ experience, but from the degree and type of threat that the experience poses to an established system of law and order. In other words, the nature and degree of a particular heresy may depend more on the structure of the system than on the particular experience had. As such, it seems just as inaccurate to claim that ‘mystical experience is a conservative phenomenon’¹⁴⁹ as it is to claim that it is inherently heretical.

This notwithstanding, Katz *does* characterize mystical experience as ‘conservative’, as is suggested by the title, “The conservative character of mystical experience” (1983), the follow-up article to his 1978 ‘plea for the recognition of differences’. But there is something in this plea that appears to betray a serious weakness in his contextual approach: there is no ‘bottom limit’ concerning how fine-pointed we can become in terms of distinguishing these differences. If, for instance, one were to assume a ‘bottom limit’ to be at the conceptual borders of each religious system, it seems we must also assume this ‘border’ to be static and uniform, leaving no room for the possibility of schism or changes within the system itself. However, internal religious schisms are a well-established feature of all

¹⁴⁹ See: “The conservative character of mystical experience” in Katz, 1983. This is also discussed in chapter five.

religious traditions, and require no introduction for anyone even slightly acquainted with the differences in belief and practice, even among the varieties of Christian adherents who seem no better at praying to one and the same God than the Hindus. And if one continues down this road of identifying contextual differences that affect the beliefs and practices of the adherents of religious systems, one might end up with as many *different* systems of belief and practice as there are adherents.

It would be hasty to conclude that Katz is not aware that such schisms exist in each major religious tradition. Yet it is safe to say that there is no way that Katz's contextual explanation of the differences among mystical experiences, when taken to its logical end, can continue to make sense in the face of all these internal divides. It is one thing to argue that there are differences between mystical experiences across the borders of religious traditions that have wholly different systems of beliefs, practices and understandings of the absolute. However, what about differences in beliefs, practices and ultimate understandings that arise within the borders of a religious tradition? How could one be certain, for example, that the 'Allah' experienced by one Muslim mystic is the *same* as the 'Allah' experienced by another Muslim mystic?

Katz's theory appears to include the theoretical assumption that all Muslims would experience the *same* Allah, having been taught by the tradition of Islam to experience Allah in a certain way. However, if that is what they all experience – and *all* they experience – then mystical experience *is* a mere construct of the expectations, beliefs, and so forth of the mystics of respective religious tradition. As will be discussed, Katz makes an attempt to avoid constructivist reduction by introducing the element of realism into his notion of mystical experience. It remains to be seen how successfully Katz manages to combine an alleged realism with the “over-determination” of experience by pre-experiential interpretive patterns.

1.5. The problems recapitulated

According to Katz, the experience of a mystic is tightly aligned to the religious tradition in which she has been raised, educated and trained. Thus she tends to experience the “solutions” proposed by her specific

tradition. And since these solutions are different across religious traditions, so are the mystical experiences. The first question we must ask of this understanding is what precise difference there is between knowing something “existentially” and knowing it “through propositions”? If the difference is a phenomenal one, why should we be unable to talk about it in terms of ‘pure experience’, i.e. that dimension of an experience that exceeds conceptual understanding? One might term that difference non-conceptual knowledge, so why not ‘pure’, i.e. “without any conceptual (or other) mediation”? And how can this be combined with a realism concerning mystical experience?

Katz insists that the Christian mystics experience a Christian Jesus, the Muslim mystics a Muslim Allah and the Buddhist mystics a Buddhist Nothingness; at the same time he appears to insist that we must leave room for the possibility that mystical experiences are ‘real’ encounters. When the insistence that mystical experience is determined by pre-experiential conditioning is juxtaposed with the insistence that mystical experience somehow involves contact with ‘the real’, this creates a major conflict or inconsistency in Katz’s theory, making it difficult to interpret without an indication as to which of these conflicting views should be given primacy.

Why is this so? Because if there is a natural object that corresponds to the description of the mystic’s encounter, and that encounter is coloured by the interpretational pattern that the mystic brings to his experience,¹⁵⁰ this clearly allows both for the possibility of pure experience and for the possibility that mystics in general are encountering the *same* natural object although their descriptions – and experiences – differ as a result of their ‘conditioning’. The perennial claim, however, is not that all mystics experience the same object; this is a metaphysical conclusion that one may draw if one is inclined towards metaphysics. The perennial claim is that the same *phenomenal characteristics*, independent of *object* or *conditioning*, occur in the descriptions of mystics from different religious traditions. Walter T. Stace, among others, has formulated a set of

¹⁵⁰ Katz 1978a, p. 26. Katz writes: “The experience itself as well as the form in which it is reported is shaped by concepts which the mystic brings to, and which shape, his experience.”

phenomenal characteristics that Katz has rejected. Why does Katz find it necessary to reject Stace's list?

Katz argues that the set of characteristics of mystical experience proposed by various perennial interpreters (primarily Stace) are insufficient because of their generality. In other words, Katz argues not only that mystics experience different Realities or 'objects', but also that these realities or 'objects' make their mystical experiences what they are. The fact that mystical experiences are reported to be 'joyful', 'ineffable', 'frightening', 'realistic', 'unitive' or 'cognitive' is not enough. In Katz's view, the qualitative aspect of the experience, independent of whatever 'object' it 'contains', fails to describe or delineate what a "mystical experience is".¹⁵¹ The common-core characteristics identified by perennial interpreters as typical of mystical experience are based on general epistemological and experience-based considerations, not on the 'objects' that the mystical experiences 'contain'. This is why Katz believes them to be not only "too general" to outline mystical experience, but also distortive of our understanding of what mystical experience is. For Katz mystical experiences are defined by their 'contents' and not by the epistemological or experiential characteristics that are displayed in mystical reports.

If this is indeed the case, one could legitimately ask: what is the specific value of mystical or any other experience? If mystical experience claims basically reflect the religious claims of a given mystic's tradition, and if there is nothing more to such experiences than this, it makes no sense to study, examine and try to understand mystical experience claims; one would likely become more informed about mystical experience by studying a given tradition's *religious* texts than by studying the experiential reports of its *mystics*. What, then, is the sense of a project aimed at interpreting mystical experience reports? And why does Katz develop a theory of mystical experience based on the interpretation of mystical reports? Why not base it instead on the interpretation of sacred scripture or on the interpretation of contextual facilitative methods?

¹⁵¹ Katz 1978a, p. 51.

From “Language, epistemology and mysticism” (1978) to “Mystical speech and mystical meaning” (1992) to “Mysticism and the interpretation of sacred scripture” (2000) it becomes clearer and clearer that, in Katz’s view, the salient features of mystical experience (i.e. the ‘objects’ that mystics experience) are pre-experientially shaped, and that these experiences are facilitated by the propositions presented by the given religious tradition. Pre-experiential facilitation is not a new discovery. It has also been noted by common-core theorists, although their methods are far more diverse than merely reading and incorporating texts. Looking at the various religious practices that have played either a broad integrative role within the fabric of a whole religious community or a more narrow formative role in changing the consciousness of a given experiencer, perennialists have sought to discover the means whereby consciousness can be transformed so as to become more receptive of transcendent Reality; and the common factor thus discovered among these diverse systems of facilitation is thought to be the ‘purification’ of consciousness.

Non-conceptuality – whether achieved through intense prayer, isolation and long-term solitude, self-mortification, meditative practices or the ingestion of substances thought to produce ‘altered states’ – has been identified by perennialists as a common aim.¹⁵² The level-theory of interpretative acts is addressed and explicitly described in Arthur Deikman’s “Deautomatization and the mystic experience” (1973). In terms of this thesis, ‘deautomatization’ can be understood as the gradual setting aside of the automatic onset of the interpretive pattern that is normally actualized in similar situations. The achievement of a ‘pure consciousness experience’ is described as a long process by most perennialists, a process involving various ‘stages’ of development, regardless of whether the actual goal is achieved or not. When conceived

¹⁵² See, for instance, Deikman’s account in which he quotes a passage from *The Cloud of Unknowing* to exemplify “a procedure to be followed in order to attain intuitive knowledge of God. Such an experience is called mystical because it is considered beyond the scope of language to convey” [Deikman 1973 (1966), p. 240] Deikman is interested in the psychological mechanisms that lie behind this phenomenon and transcend the theological context they are presented within. In *The Observing Self* (1982), Deikman also argues that this methodology of attaining alternate states could be useful as a methodological model in psychiatric treatment.

in this way, ‘gradual deautomatization’ implies gradual non-conceptuality, or non-conceptuality in certain respects or with respect to certain domains. The possibility of ‘stages’ of deautomatization seems to be rejected by Katz. Instead he offers the contextualist view that it is not an “*unconditioning*” or “*deconditioning*” of consciousness that occurs, but only a “*reconditioning*”. Addressing a practice generally associated with the Buddhist and Hindu traditions, Katz explains what the practitioners *really* do:

For it is in appearance only that such activities as yoga produce the desired state of ‘pure’ consciousness. Properly understood, yoga, for example, is *not* an *unconditioning* or *deconditioning* of consciousness, but rather a *reconditioning* of consciousness, i.e. a substituting of one form of conditioned and/or contextual consciousness for another ...¹⁵³

This view also applies as a response to critics that have noted Katz’s inability to account for ‘spontaneous’ and ‘non-religiously’ contextualized experiences. If Forman, for instance, would understand his experience “properly”, Katz might argue, he would realize that his context is TM (transcendental meditation), and that he has ‘learned’ what to experience from the ‘tradition’ that promotes this sort of activity. William P Gregory confirms this by citing a statement made by Katz at a conference speech in 2000:

... Katz points out that Forman’s PCE is “very much part of a specific tradition... ‘Transcendental Meditation.’ The experience of “pure consciousness” is “colored by the assumptions of ‘Transcendental Meditation,’ and is actually a part of the teaching of ‘Transcendental Meditation.’ It is not independent of all mediation.”¹⁵⁴

And regarding other non-religiously contextualized experiences identified as ‘mystical’ by perennialists, Katz considers these to be conditioned by context as well: the context of modernity, and all that this implies.

We now turn to a detailed presentation of the paper that started all the controversy: Katz’s 1978 article, “Language, Epistemology and Mysticism.”

¹⁵³ Katz 1978a, p 57

¹⁵⁴ This quote comes from “Comments made at a presentation of a paper on the theme ‘Mysticism and its contexts’ at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion 2000, Mysticism group, November 19, 2000” (Gregory, 2006, p. 289)

Part II: Material

Chapter 2

“Language, epistemology, and mysticism” and its place in Katz’s philosophy of mysticism

Introduction to chapter two

For six decades prior to the publication of Katz’s “Language, epistemology, and mysticism” (1978), research on mystical experience had been dominated by phenomenologically inclined interpretations that more or less followed the philosophy of William James. Thus Arthur Deikman’s theory of deautomatization, Roland Fischer’s cartography of meditative and ecstatic states of consciousness, Rudolf Otto’s description of numinous experience, R. C. Zaehner’s typology of mystical experiences and Walter T. Stace’s explicit common-core philosophy depended upon the idea that all mystical experiences contain an ‘essence’ conceptualized as their ‘common-core’. As can be seen in the following quote from Katz’s ‘letter of invitation to the symposium’, the aim and intent of his 1978 article was strongly motivated by his dissatisfaction with this ‘perennialist’ notion and his desire to supplant it:

The aim of the collection is to investigate various aspects of the subject [of mysticism] from a sensitive yet rigorous philosophical perspective. The object is to try to advance the discussion and analysis of the subject beyond James and Otto, Stace and Zaehner. We would like to have essays which investigate and clarify basic aspects of the subject so that we can move beyond the position which is philosophically unsophisticated and fails to distinguish between various types of mystical experience on the one hand and the logic and language of different types of mystical claims on the other. Alternatively, we want to avoid the extremes of positivist-like rejections of such experience as ‘nonsense’ as well as the position

which rejects logic, criteria, and analyses on the dubious ground that they are out of place in the discussion of mysticism.¹⁵⁵

In his article, Katz presented a detailed description of the problems entailed in the common core approach, along with a new method of interpretation that was said to bring logic and reason to bear on the subject of mystical experience without dismissing mystical claims as nonsense. Katz's aim was to replace the old 'unsophisticated' approaches of common-core interpreters by allowing one central epistemological assumption to inform and guide his investigation: i.e., "there are NO pure (unmediated) experiences".¹⁵⁶

In the years following the publication of "Language, epistemology, and mysticism", the contextual approach presented therein has been neither departed from nor abandoned in Katz's subsequent works on mysticism. On the contrary, he has sought to bolster his idea with sharper contours and various theoretical reinforcements. In "The conservative character of mystical experience" (1983), for example, Katz's original 1978 thesis appears largely intact,¹⁵⁷ the conclusion being that mystical experience is at least partially constructed out of the contextual features of a given mystic's socio-religious environment:¹⁵⁸

In sum, our deconstruction and re-conceptualization suggests that *models* play an important role in providing our map of reality and what is real, and, thus, contribute to the creation of experience – I repeat to the *creation* of experience. This is a fact to be pondered, and pondered again.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵ Katz 1978, p. 3.

¹⁵⁶ Katz 1978a, p. 26.

¹⁵⁷ Katz 1983a. On page 4, for example, he restates his 1978 article's central assumption: "There are NO pure (i.e. unmediated) experiences."

¹⁵⁸ The question of whether Katz's theory indicates that it is 'partially' or 'totally' constructed this way is a matter of ongoing discussion. Nelson Pike and Richard Swinburne – among others – have accepted Katz's characterization. (See Pike 1993, and Swinburne, 1979.) For his part, Katz claims that he does not want mysticism to be viewed as "*only* a conservative phenomenon" (in Katz 1982a, p 3, *italics* his), but instead wishes to promote a "dialectic" view of the relationship between "the innovative and traditional poles of the religious life" (p 3f). This desire, however, appears to be contradicted by the conclusions with which he sums up his inquiry. In these there seems to be little or nothing left of the 'innovative' part of mystical experience.

¹⁵⁹ Katz 1983a, p 51 (original italics)

Additionally, Katz's position regarding the issues of cognitivity (as an outcome of mystical experience) and the facilitation of mystical experience remain fundamentally unchanged.

The next publication in the collection of Katz's investigations on mystical experience is the article "Mystical speech and mystical meaning" (1992). Here Katz focuses on the language of mystics, employing his findings in an effort to support the idea of differences in the experiences of mystics. Explicitly addressing the various critics of the contextual approach presented in "Language, epistemology and mysticism", he asserts that he has "not yet been dissuaded of its correctness".¹⁶⁰ During that same year, Katz published two further articles on the subject: "Ethics and mysticism in eastern mystical traditions"¹⁶¹ and "Mysticism and ethics in western mystical traditions"¹⁶² (1992). These articles were initially presented at a 1984 conference¹⁶³ in response to claims that mystics are non-moral and centre upon the presence of ethical consciousness in mysticism. Their basic point is closely connected to that which is presented in "The conservative character of mystical experience" (1983) – i.e., that views concerning the non-morality of mystics arise from the 'misapprehension' of mystics as religious revolutionaries:

It is yet another distorted and distorting manifestation of the still more universal misapprehension that mystics are essentially arch-individualists, 'Lone Rangers' of the spirit, whose sole intention is to escape the religious environment that spawned them in order to find personal liberation or salvation.¹⁶⁴

Rather than as heretics or 'arch-individualists', mystics are seen by Katz's as individuals that, for the most part, conserve the religious doctrines of their tradition and experience the 'solutions' proposed by that same traditions:

¹⁶⁰ Katz 1992a, p. 5.

¹⁶¹ Katz 1992b.

¹⁶² Katz 1992c.

¹⁶³ They were delivered as *David Baumgart Memorial Lectures* at Harvard University, 10 November 1984.

¹⁶⁴ Katz 1992b, p. 253.

All these mystical personalities intended and experienced, they had *knowledge by acquaintance*, what their communities taught as *knowledge by description*.¹⁶⁵

Again the message is the same: mystics have *different* experiences that are shaped by the communities and traditions from which those mystics arise. Already in his 1984 articles, Katz had pointed to the important role played by sacred scriptures (and their languages) in forming the experiences of mystics, a view that received further development in “Mystical speech and mystical meaning” (1992), which analysed the different *uses of language* displayed by mystics. “Mysticism and the interpretation of sacred scripture” (2000) presents yet another confirmation of this understanding, this time with an emphasis on *sacred scripture* and its impact on the experiences of mystics. The conclusion presented in this last article can be seen as a consequence of the original contextual thesis articulated in “Language, epistemology and mysticism” as well as a reinforcement of its central thesis – all with the apparent aim of increasing our understanding of mystical experience reports:

If one seeks to understand how mystical fellowships work and how individual mystics pursue their ambitious metaphysical goals, then one not only has to concentrate attention on the rarefied, and rare, moments of ecstasy, adhesion, supernatural marriage, mindlessness, satori, nirvana and unity, but one also has to pay close attention to the sorts of exegetical techniques, and the ways of studying scripture, that are described in this essay. For the actual interpretation of sacred texts in these ways comprises a substantial part of what mystics actually do and plays a significant role in achieving those ultimate states of experience (or metaexperience) that mystics seek.¹⁶⁶

Indeed all of the articles that have appeared in the wake of “Language, epistemology and mysticism” can be viewed as providing extensions and further examples of Katz’s central epistemological assumption that there is no such thing as a pure (unmediated) experience; on the other hand, not one of them seems to have properly addressed the various questions and criticisms that have arisen as a result of his original presentation. In other words, no new idea or theoretical adjustment has emerged in

¹⁶⁵ Katz 1983a, p. 21.

¹⁶⁶ Katz 2000a, p. 56.

Katz's later writings that would distinguish them in any substantial way from his original views presented in "Language, epistemology and mysticism". Thus the primary focus of this chapter will be on the content of this article, next presented in a manner aimed at preserving Katz's original line of argumentation as faithfully as possible.¹⁶⁷

2.1. The structure of the article

Katz's most concise characterization of "Language, epistemology and mysticism" is as a "plea for the recognition of differences".¹⁶⁸ The 'differences' referred to are, of course, those that he perceives to exist between various mystical experiences across a variety of social and religious boundaries, a finding that he believes to contradict the view that all mystical experiences have identifiably similar features. Katz's article consists of four sections, with the 'plea for the recognition of differences' being emphasised at the outset. In the first section he introduces the problem and discusses the insufficiency of past ('perennial' or 'common-core') interpretational methods, a discussion that he continues in the second section together with a presentation of the main features of his alternative interpretational approach. Here Katz introduces the central epistemological assumption upon which most elements in his contextual theory of interpretation rest: the assumption that there are no pure (unmediated) experiences. In section three, Katz provides further evidence that his contextual model has advantages that exceed the advantages of perennial interpretative models, concluding that the differences in the experiences of mystics are obvious and must be taken into account. In section four, Katz summarizes his conclusions and the major points of his contextual approach.

¹⁶⁷ Another reason for the focus on "Language, epistemology and mysticism" concerns the many and diverse reactions it has received. As already mentioned in subsection 1.2., a major objective of this thesis is to clear up some of the 'misunderstandings' that have arisen relative to the original presentation of Katz's contextual approach. In the following chapters, Katz's position will be presented largely, but not exclusively, on the basis of "Language, epistemology and mysticism". Further complementary sources will include: 1) the articles referred to above; 2) Katz's replies to my questionnaire; and, 3) William P. Gregory's collection of material from Katz's writings on Judaism and the Holocaust.

¹⁶⁸ Katz 1978a, p. 25.

Section I

In order to clear the way for a focus on “main epistemological concerns”,¹⁶⁹ Katz introduces the problems associated with mystical states by referring to the terms ‘verification’ and ‘interpretation’. Beginning with the issue of ‘verification’, Katz’s notes that mystical experience cannot be verified, if by ‘verification’ one means “the strong thesis that independent grounds for the claimed event/experience can be publicly demonstrated”.¹⁷⁰ Considering this, Katz concludes that

...no veridical propositions can be generated on the basis of mystical experience. As a consequence it appears certain that mystical experience is not and logically cannot be the grounds for *any* final assertions about the nature or truth of any religious or philosophical position nor, more particularly, for any specific dogmatic or theological belief. Whatever validity mystical experience has, it does not translate itself into ‘reasons’ which can be taken as evidence for a given religious proposition. Thus, in the final analysis, mystical or more generally religious experience is irrelevant in establishing the truth or falsity of religion in general or any specific religion in particular.¹⁷¹

By this, Katz does not mean to say that mystical experiences do not happen or that the claims of mystics are not true, only that “there can be no grounds for deciding this question, i.e. of showing that they are true *even* if they are, in fact, true”.¹⁷² Katz states that it does not “seem reasonable to reduce these multiple and variegated claims to mere projected ‘psychological states’ which are solely the product of interior states of consciousness”.¹⁷³ With these words Katz closes the issue of ‘verification’, and moves on briefly to mention the issue of ‘interpretation’.

Katz initiates the discussion on interpretational issues with the general concern that “the work done [in this regard] seems to me, despite the beginnings of some valuable investigations on this area, to be still

¹⁶⁹ Katz 1978a, p. 22.

¹⁷⁰ Katz 1978a, p. 22.

¹⁷¹ Katz 1978a, p. 22.

¹⁷² Katz 1978a, p. 22. Italics are original.

¹⁷³ Katz 1978a, p. 23.

preliminary in terms of its methodology as well as its results”.¹⁷⁴ By ‘interpretation’ Katz means “the standard accounts of the subject which attempt to investigate what the mystic had to say *about* his experience”.¹⁷⁵ These accounts are classified according to different perspectives: “(a) the first-person report of the mystic; (b) the mystic’s ‘interpretation’ of his own experience, at a later, more reflective, and mediated, stage; (c) the ‘interpretation’ of a third person within the same tradition (Christians on Christian Mysticism); (d) the process of interpretation by third persons in other traditions (Buddhists on Christianity); and so on”.¹⁷⁶ Katz ascribes importance to these accounts, but wants to direct our attention to the more basic concerns: the “preinterpretive” issues.¹⁷⁷

These ‘preinterpretive’ issues are the focus of Katz’s ‘epistemological’ concerns. To explain his position, Katz addresses the problematic content in the “almost universally accepted schema of the relation which is *claimed* to exist between one mystic’s experience (and his report of the experience) and the experience of other mystics”.¹⁷⁸ In order of degree of sophistication, Katz divides the accounts of the “almost universally accepted schema” into three major classes, all of which share the claim that mystical experience has the ‘same’ or ‘similar’ content across cultural and religious boundaries.¹⁷⁹ Katz rejects the accounts of these ‘perennialist’ proponents one by one, mentioning such figures as Huxley, Zaehner, Stace, and Smart. In this connection he notes that

...the phenomenological typologies of Stace and Zaehner are too reductive and inflexible, forcing multifarious and extremely variegated forms of mystical experience into improper interpretative categories which lose sight of the fundamentally important differences between the data studied.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁴ Katz 1978a, p. 23.

¹⁷⁵ Katz 1978a, p. 23. Italics are original.

¹⁷⁶ Katz 1978a, p. 23.

¹⁷⁷ Katz 1978a, p. 23.

¹⁷⁸ Katz 1978a, p. 23.

¹⁷⁹ Katz 1978a, pp. 23-4.

¹⁸⁰ Katz 1978a, p. 25.

As previously indicated, Katz concludes this first section of “Language, epistemology and mysticism” by describing his attempt as a “plea for the recognition of differences”.¹⁸¹

Section II

Since the most basic features of Katz’s contextual theory are outlined in this section, it will be treated in greater detail.

The primary concern of Katz’s investigation is *not* the typologies of mystical experience that have been the focus of researchers such as James, Underhill, Inge, Jones, Otto, Zaehner and Stace. For Katz the more fundamental question is “why the various mystical experiences are the experiences they are”.¹⁸² To clarify the meaning of this question, Katz explains that

...the single epistemological assumption that has exercised my thinking and which has forced me to undertake the present investigation [is that]: *There are NO pure (i.e. unmediated) experiences.* Neither mystical experience, nor more ordinary forms of experience give any indication, or any grounds for believing that they are unmediated. This is to say, *all* experience is processed through, organized by, and makes itself available to us in extremely complex epistemological ways. The notion of unmediated experience, seems, if not self-contradictory, at best empty. This epistemological fact seems to me to be true, because of the sorts of beings we are, even with regard to the experiences of those ultimate objects of concern with which mystics have intercourse, e.g. God, Being, nirvana, etc.¹⁸³

Katz notes that this ‘mediated’ feature of all experience has been “overlooked or underplayed by every major investigator of mystical experience”.¹⁸⁴ According to Katz, had the perennialists recognized the significance of this fundamental epistemological point, it would have led them to conclude that

...in order to understand mysticism it is not just a question of studying the reports of the mystic after the experiential event but of acknowledging

¹⁸¹ Katz 1978a, p. 25.

¹⁸² Katz 1978a, p. 25.

¹⁸³ Katz 1978a, p. 26. Italics are original.

¹⁸⁴ Katz 1978a, p. 26.

that the experience itself as well as the form in which it is reported is shaped by concepts which the mystic brings to, and which shape, his experience.¹⁸⁵

In Katz's view this means that "the Hindu mystic does not have an experience of x which he then describes in the, to him, familiar language and symbols of Hinduism, but rather he has a Hindu experience, i.e. his experience is not an unmediated experience of x but is itself the, at least partially, pre-formed anticipated Hindu experience of Brahman."¹⁸⁶ Contrasting this with the example of a Christian mystic, Katz concludes that "the Hindu experience of Brahman and the Christian experience of God are not the same".¹⁸⁷ This is because

...the forms of consciousness which the mystic brings to experience set structured and limiting parameters on what the experience will be, i.e. on what will be experienced, and rule out in advance what is 'inexperienceable' in the particular given, concrete, context.¹⁸⁸

Herein lays the main point of contention between Katz and the 'perennial' interpreters of mystical experience. Since the perennialists do not acknowledge the epistemological point that there are no pure (unmediated) experiences, they underplay the effect of pre-experiential patterns on experience itself. In the remaining sections of "Language, epistemology and mysticism", Katz intends to supply "full supporting evidence and argumentation" for his claim that

...this process of differentiation of mystical experience into the patterns and symbols of established religious communities is experiential and does not only take place in the post-experiential process of reporting and interpreting the experience itself: it is at work before, during and after the experience.¹⁸⁹

Katz's arguments and supporting evidence consist of two basic elements: 1) extensive reasoning directed at establishing that the perennialist approach is fundamentally flawed; and, 2) a wide variety of examples

¹⁸⁵ Katz 1978a, p. 26.

¹⁸⁶ Katz 1978a, p. 26.

¹⁸⁷ Katz 1978a, p. 26.

¹⁸⁸ Katz 1978a, pp. 26-7.

¹⁸⁹ Katz 1978a, p. 27.

from ‘mystical literature’ that are said to confirm Katz’s point of view and suggest that his interpretation is the superior of the two.

The argumentation

Katz’s discussion regarding the perennialists’ failure to recognize the force of pre-experiential conditioning begins with the work of Stace. Citing a number of statements from Stace’s writings, Katz concludes that, despite his awareness of the difficulties involved in distinguishing between experience and interpretation, Stace “fails to grasp clearly the force of this concern about the impossibility of ‘pure’ experience and what this entails”:¹⁹⁰

For Stace turns the discussion into a discussion of the post-experience interpretation placed on the experience rather than pursuing *in any sense at all* the primary epistemological issues which the original recognition requires.¹⁹¹

By ‘primary epistemological issues’, Katz here means those related to the central assumption that there is no such thing as a pure experience. Katz continues to critique Stace’s “naively conceived distinction between experience and interpretation” as follows:¹⁹²

The focus of Stace’s remarks is on the relation between the mystics’ experience and ‘the beliefs which the mystics based on their experiences’. Here the symmetry is always one-directional: from experience to beliefs. There is no recognition that this relationship contains a two-directional symmetry: beliefs shape experience, just as experience shapes belief.¹⁹³

Katz next notes that, unlike Stace, Zaehner realized “that it is not easy to draw all mystical experience together in one basically undifferentiated category”.¹⁹⁴ However, Katz does not consider this to be enough; that is why Zaehner is still seen to attempt a cross-cultural typology with an inadequate phenomenology at its base: “Zaehner’s well-known investigations flounder because his methodological, hermeneutical, and

¹⁹⁰ Katz 1978a, p. 28.

¹⁹¹ Katz 1978a, p. 28.

¹⁹² Katz 1978a, p. 29.

¹⁹³ Katz 1978a, p. 30.

¹⁹⁴ Katz 1978a, pp. 30-31.

especially epistemological resources are weak”.¹⁹⁵ Again, it is the claimed ‘sameness’ of mystical experiences that Katz finds problematic. Zaehner divides mystical experience into three types: theistic, monistic and panenhenic. Katz argues that this results in a ‘reductionistic’ and ‘overly simplistic’ theory of interpretation. This is because

...both Jewish and Christian mysticism are for the most part theistic in the broad sense, yet the experience of the Jewish mystics is radically different from that met in Christian circles. And again, the ‘theism’ of Bhagavad Gita or of Ramanuja is markedly different from the theism of Theresa of Avila, Isaac Luria or Al Hallaj. Alternatively the monism of Shankara is not the monism of Spinoza or Eckhart. And again Buddhism, for example, though classified according to Zaehner’s phenomenology as monistic, is really not to be so pigeon-holed.¹⁹⁶

The ‘plea for the recognition of differences’ echoes throughout Katz’s analysis of both Stace’s and Zaehner’s phenomenological approaches. They fail “to investigate or to consider in [their] own investigation of mystical experience the *conditions of experience* in general and the specific conditions of religious/mystical experience in particular”.¹⁹⁷ The ‘conditions of experience’ referred to in the above quotation are, once again, those mediating factors that prevent the apprehension of a pure experience.

As a way of helping his readers better comprehend the meaning of mediated experience, Katz offers the phrase, ‘the child is father to the man’, applying it to the belief-system of a Jewish mystic. In Katz’s example, the Jewish mystic, since childhood, has been conditioned to have certain beliefs about ultimate reality, beliefs that, in turn, determine the experiences of the mystic:

That is to say, the entire life of the Jewish mystic is permeated from childhood up by images, concepts, symbols, ideological values, and ritual behaviour which there is no reason to believe he leaves behind in his experience. Rather, these images, beliefs, symbols and rituals define, *in*

¹⁹⁵ Katz 1978a, p. 32.

¹⁹⁶ Katz 1978a, p. 32.

¹⁹⁷ Katz 1978a, p. 32. Italics are original.

advance, what the experience *he wants to have*, and which he then does have, will be like.¹⁹⁸

How this “complex pre-experiential pattern affects the actual experience of the Jewish mystic”¹⁹⁹ is indicated by Katz’s description of “the performance of *mitzvot* (commandments) for reaching the mystic goal and how this interpenetration of ritual and mystical actions (*mitzvot*) with the goal of relation to God affects the kind of experience one *anticipates* having and then, *in fact*, does have”.²⁰⁰ From some central details in Kabbalistic doctrine Katz concludes that

...the Jewish conditioning pattern so strongly impresses that tradition’s mystics (as all Jews) with the fact that one does *not* have mystical experiences of God in which one loses one’s identity in ecstatic moments of unity, that the Jewish mystic rarely, if ever, has such experiences. What the Jewish mystic experiences is, perhaps, the Divine Throne, or the angel Metatron, or aspects of the *Sefirot*, or the heavenly court and palaces, or the Hidden Torah, or God’s secret Names, but not loss of self and unity with God.²⁰¹

As evidence Katz cites:

The absence of the kinds of experience of unity one often, but mistakenly, associates with mysticism, even as the ‘essence of mysticism’, in the Jewish mystical context, is *very* strong evidence that pre-experiential conditioning affects the nature of the experience one actually has.²⁰²

Katz’s next example concerns the state of *devekuth* in Jewish mystical contexts. Here Katz attempts to demonstrate that the experiences themselves – and not merely the post-experiential reports – are shaped by patterns provided by Jewish mystical literature. As evidence of this he notes the close conformity between all Jewish mystical testimonies and the pattern given in Jewish mystical literature.²⁰³

Katz finds the same type of connection between mystical testimony and mystical literature in Buddhist mysticism as well. After making a

¹⁹⁸ Katz 1978a, p. 33.

¹⁹⁹ Katz 1978a, p. 34.

²⁰⁰ Katz 1978a, pp. 33-4.

²⁰¹ Katz 1978a, p. 34.

²⁰² Katz 1978a, pp. 34-5.

²⁰³ Katz 1978a, p. 36

thorough presentation of the elements that he believes construct the Buddhist mystical experience, he concludes:

Whatever *nirvana* is, and indeed whatever *devekuth* is, in so far as words mean anything and philosophical enquiry has any significance, there is no way one can describe, let alone equate, the experience of *nirvana* and *devekuth* on the basis of the evidence. There is no intelligible way anyone can argue that a no-self experience of 'empty' calm is the same experience as the experience of intense, loving, intimate relationship between two substantial selves, one of whom is conceived of as the personal God of western religion and all that this entails.²⁰⁴

The experiences are *not* "the same" Katz argues, and any typology attempting a cross-religious account of 'mysticism' would be wrongly directed. The remainder of section two provides further evidence of the 'differences' between the mystical experiences of mystics coming from different traditions. In this regard Katz considers Ruysbroeck's *unio mystica* to be nothing like "(a) the dualistic experience of *devekuth*; (b) the no-self, no-God, no-relation experience of *nirvana*; (c) the naturalistic mysticism of those like Richard Jefferies; (d) the non-absorptive mysticism of non-Jewish mystics whose experiences differ from that of *devekuth*; or even (e) the absorptive mystics who superficially seem closest, such as the Advaitans".²⁰⁵

To further reinforce the thesis that "mystical experience is 'over-determined' by its socio-religious milieu",²⁰⁶ Katz also notes that discipleship within mystical traditions is another way through which mystics learn what to experience: just as the mystic's experiences are informed and shaped by the holy scriptures of their respective traditions, so they are also informed and shaped by the instructions of their gurus. And if the traditions are different, the experiences of the mystics must also differ.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ Katz 1978a, pp. 39-40.

²⁰⁵ Katz 1978a, pp. 41-2.

²⁰⁶ Katz 1978a, p. 46.

²⁰⁷ Because there are no 'pure' experiences, the mystics cannot escape the impact of socio-religious context. Thus the socio-religious context shapes the experiences of mystics.

Section III

In this section, Katz seeks support for his “contextual thesis”²⁰⁸ by pointing out the “curious logical-philosophical problems inherent in the study of mysticism”.²⁰⁹ The initial problem concerns the meaning of the terms used by mystics to describe their experience. It is an inadequate evaluation of these meanings that is thought to be the

... factor that misleads those like Underhill, Otto, Stace, Bucke, Arberry, and Zaehner, among others, into thinking that all mystics are referring to the same experience or to a small number of similar experiences.²¹⁰

Katz first notes that Stace is in error when he argues for a common core in mystical experience based on the fact that mystics of different religious traditions use similar language to describe their experiences. He concludes that Stace, and others who “follow a similar procedure” have been “misled by the surface grammar of the mystical reports they study”.²¹¹

That is to say, what appear to be similar sounding descriptions are not similar descriptions and do *not* indicate the same experience. They do not because language is itself contextual and words ‘mean’ only in contexts. The same words – beautiful, sublime, ultimate reality, ineffable, paradoxical, joyful, transcending all empirical content, etc. – can apply and have been applied to more than one object.²¹²

²⁰⁸ Katz 1978a, p. 46.

²⁰⁹ Katz 1978a, p. 46.

²¹⁰ Katz 1978a, p. 46.

²¹¹ Katz 1978a, p. 46.

²¹² Katz 1978a, pp. 46-7. Unfortunately, Katz never distinguishes between *same* (numerically identical) and *similar* (qualitatively identical) experiences, a distinction which would allow for other types of discussions about the experiences of mystics. Concerning Katz’s position, he is right in claiming that the experiences of mystics from different religious traditions are not the *same*, since no two experiences (not even those had by the *same* mystic) are the *same* experience (which means that differences in religious background is not the reason for the correctness of this claim). On the other hand, if the claim only concerns *similarity* in experience (which is the alternative being treated in this thesis), it is extremely doubtful if Katz could make a sincere claim to find no similarities whatsoever between the experiences of mystics coming from different traditions. As I understand the ‘perennialist’ claim, the Muslim unitive experience is claimed to have some similarity with the unitive experience of a Christian one, in spite

In Katz's view, the descriptions are not similar (or the same) because they are predicated of different objects in mystical experience. Thus, Katz argues:

Again, 'ineffable' *nirvana* is not the 'ineffable' *Allah* of the Sufi, nor the 'ineffable' *Allah* of the Sufi the 'ineffable' *Tao* of Taoism.²¹³

Likewise, the Absolute Thou of Buber is not the Absolute Thou of Kafka, just as the 'truths' displayed to Castaneda are claimed not to be the same 'truths' the Zen master claims.²¹⁴ Mystics have different experiences for the very reason that they encounter *different* Realities in their experiences:

It seems clear that these respective mystics do not experience the same Reality or objectivity, and therefore it is not reasonable to posit that their respective experiences of Reality or objectivity are similar.²¹⁵

According to Katz, this is at least partially explained by the way language is used: "*different* metaphysical entities can be 'described' by the same phrases if these phrases are indefinite enough".²¹⁶ Apparently similar descriptive phrases are not being used univocally, and this is something the common-core interpreters have not taken into account.

of the theological differences between the two traditions. Katz's criticism is directed towards perennialist claims of sameness or similarity. In this limited context, I cannot examine in detail whether perennialists in general (or any specific perennialist for that matter) consider(s) the experiences of mystics to be the same or to be similar, though I believe it to be an absurd interpretation that Stace, Huxley or any other perennialist would claim that the experiences are the *same* – even if had by the *same* mystic. Nevertheless, as we soon shall see, this is exactly how Katz discusses the perennial position.

²¹³ Katz 1978a, p. 48.

²¹⁴ Katz 1978a, p. 49.

²¹⁵ Katz 1978a, p. 50.

²¹⁶ Katz 1978a, p. 51. As true as it is that different objects have been described with various 'indefinite phrases', it is also true that different objects have been described with 'definite' phrases, like 'brown shoes' or 'square tables'. Whether the phrases are definite or indefinite has thus nothing to do with how many different objects (or 'metaphysical entities') they can describe. Katz makes a case of this, and warns that "Analysis of these terms indicates their relativity; they are applied to a variety of alternative and even mutually exclusive 'states of affairs' and 'states of no-affairs'. This variety itself should alert us to the real danger and arbitrariness involved in this gambit." (Katz 1978a, pp. 58-9).

Taking the term ‘nothingness’, which is often used in descriptions of Buddhist experiences, Katz argues that we must ask whether the description of the mystic is “being used as a subjective description of an experience or a putative objective description of an object or ontological state of being”.²¹⁷ What additionally must be asked is whether

...the various experiences of ‘nothingness’ are similar or dissimilar experiences of the *same* phenomenon, i.e. ‘nothingness’, or different experiences of *different* phenomena, i.e. ‘nothingness’ is a term which is used to cover alternative ontic realities.²¹⁸

Further addressing the issue of phenomenal characteristics, Katz notes that in addition to the “linguistic-cum-ontological” problems involved in the classification of experience through its phenomenological characteristics, this sort of approach entails logical problems as well. Taking the standard ascriptions ‘ineffability’ and ‘paradoxicality’ as examples, Katz asks: “Do these elements logically allow for the inquiry into the possible identity of mystical experiences and their attempted comparability, especially their claimed equivalence or similarity?”²¹⁹ For Katz the answer is no because “[w]hat ontological or logical reason demands that there be only one experience that is ineffable and paradoxical?”²²⁰ As an illustration of this Katz asks us to consider the following example:

(1) mystic A claims experience x is paradoxical and ineffable, while (2) mystic B claims experience y is paradoxical and ineffable. The only logically permissible conclusion one can draw in this situation is that both mystic A and mystic B claim their experience is paradoxical, nothing can be said about the content of their respective experiences x and y for there is no way to give content to experience x or y in such a manner as to learn anything about them, apart, as we have said, from their both being paradoxical, which could then serve as a basis of a reasonable comparison.²²¹

²¹⁷ Katz 1978a, p. 50.

²¹⁸ Katz 1978a, p. 52.

²¹⁹ Katz 1978a, p. 54.

²²⁰ Katz 1978a, p. 55.

²²¹ Katz 1978a, pp. 54-5.

These standard elements are also logically in the way of a phenomenology or typology of mysticism, since they logically “cancel out all other descriptive terms”. As a consequence

... it would appear that to take the mystics claim seriously, i.e. that his proposition that ‘x is PI’ [Paradoxical and Ineffable] is a true description, turns out to have the damaging implication that one cannot make any reasonable or even intelligible claim for any mystical proposition. The proposition ‘x is PI’ has the curious logical result that a serious interpretation of the proposition neither makes the experience x intelligible nor informs us in any way about x, but rather cancels x out of our language – which, of course, is what most mystics claim they want.²²²

Apart from his point that writers on mysticism fail to consider that terms like ‘nirvana’ or ‘God’ or ‘Being’ are not names, but rather “disguised descriptions”,²²³ Katz continues his argument for the contextual nature of mystical experience by turning to the practices of mystics aimed at “lead[ing] the ‘self’ from states of ‘conditioned’ to ‘unconditioned’ consciousness, from ‘contextual’ to ‘non-contextual awareness’”.²²⁴ In this regard, Katz criticises the perennialists for using the fact of these mystical efforts as support for their claim that mystical experiences share common features upon which a common characterization can be built:

For it is in appearance only that such activities as yoga produce the desired state of ‘pure’ consciousness. Properly understood, yoga, for example, is not an unconditioning or deconditioning of consciousness, but rather it is a reconditioning of consciousness, i.e. a substituting of one form of conditioned and/or contextual consciousness for another ...²²⁵

Katz concludes that “there is no substantive evidence to suggest that there is any pure consciousness *per se* achieved by these various, common mystical practices”,²²⁶ and thus rejects this as a common characteristic of mystical experience. All other notions related to the notion of ‘pure experience’ are also rejected on the same basis:

²²² Katz 1978a, p. 56.

²²³ Katz 1978a, p. 56.

²²⁴ Katz 1978a, p. 57.

²²⁵ Katz 1978a, p. 57.

²²⁶ Katz 1978a, p. 57.

Closely allied to the erroneous contention that we can achieve a state of pure consciousness is the oft used notion of the ‘given’ or the ‘suchness’ or the ‘real’ to describe the pure states of mystical experience which transcends all contextual epistemological colouring. But what sense do these terms have? What is the ‘given’ or the ‘suchness’ or the ‘real’? Analysis of these terms indicates their relativity; they are applied to a variety of alternative and even mutually exclusive ‘states of affairs’ and ‘states of no-affairs’. This variety itself should alert us to the real danger and arbitrariness involved in this gambit. Phenomenologists seem especially prone to this fruitless naivety – all intuit the ‘given’ but their intuitions differ significantly. It can fairly be said that no attempt to state clearly or individuate the ‘given’ has succeeded. Indeed, talk of the ‘given’ seems to be a move made to short-circuit the very sort of epistemological inquiry here being engaged in, but such a move fails because there is no evidence that there is any ‘given’ which can be disclosed without the imposition of the mediating conditions of the knower. All ‘givens’ are also the product of the process of ‘choosing’, ‘shaping’, and ‘receiving’. That is, the ‘given’ is appropriated through acts which shape it into forms which we can make intelligible to ourselves given our conceptual constitution, and which structure it in order to respond to the specific contextual needs and mechanisms of consciousness of the receiver.²²⁷

Katz claims that this sort of ‘epistemic activity’ requires “what in Kantian idiom, though not in Kant’s own manner, would be called a ‘transcendental deduction’, i.e. an argument which reveals *both* conditions of knowing in general as well as the grounds of its own operation and which is thematized according to specific possibilities”.²²⁸ Katz argues that the nature of consciousness is not a *‘tabula rasa’*; experience, including mystical experience, is contextual and mediated by “the kind of beings we are”.²²⁹ “And the kind of beings we are require that experience be not only instantaneous and discontinuous, but that it also involve memory, apprehension, expectation, language, accumulation of prior experience, concepts, and expectations”.²³⁰

Thus experience of x – be x God or nirvana – is conditioned both linguistically and cognitively by a variety of factors *including the expectation of what will be experienced*. Related to these expectations are also future

²²⁷ Katz 1978a, pp. 58-9.

²²⁸ Katz 1978a, p. 59.

²²⁹ Katz 1978a, p. 59.

²³⁰ Katz 1978a, p. 59.

directed activities such as meditation, fasting, ritual abolitions, self-mortification, and so on, which create further expectations about what the future and future states of consciousness will be like. There is obviously a self-fulfilling prophetic aspect to this sort of activity.²³¹

The point is made once again: there is no escaping the contextual factors that shape experience. After two lengthy quotations from Ruysbroeck, in which Ruysbroeck describes a sequence of *unio mystica*, Katz's analysis of the quotation suggests the same conclusion:

Though [Ruysbroeck's] description may appear, on first reading, epistemologically, theologically, or metaphysically neutral, closer inspection will reveal a myriad of epistemological, theological and metaphysical assumptions which colour the account both *before* and *after* it occurs.²³²

Additionally, Katz argues that mystical traditions are 'intentional' in the sense that they "intend some final state of being".²³³ For Katz this tells us more about the experiences of mystics than can a list of phenomenal characteristics:

Indeed, it appears that the different states of experience which go by the names *nirvana*, *devekuth*, *jana*, etc., are not the ground but the *outcome* of the complex epistemological activity which is set in motion by the integrating character of self-consciousness employed in the specifically mystical modality.²³⁴

Thus, intentionality – another fundamental epistemological aspect of consciousness – plays a constructive role. It is not only the experiences of mystics but also their language that is 'intentional', and the meaning Katz ascribes to 'intentionality' is described as follows:

This entire area of the 'intentionality' of experience and language of experience as it relates to mysticism is a rich area for further study. By way of only introducing the significance of this topic for our concerns, I will merely suggest that, if one looks closely at the language of mystics, as well as at mystical devotion, practices, and literature, one will find that much of it is 'intentional' in the sense suggested by Husserl and Brentano. Though I am no great admirer of either with regard to their more general

²³¹ Katz 1978a, p. 59.

²³² Katz 1978a, p. 62.

²³³ Katz 1978a, p. 62.

²³⁴ Katz 1978a, p. 62.

metaphysical positions, their discussion of ‘intentional language’ per se is instructive, for it calls to our attention that certain terms such as ‘expects’, ‘believes’, ‘hopes’, ‘seeks’, ‘searches’, ‘desires’, ‘wants’, ‘finds’, ‘looks for’, involve, as Brentano said, ‘an object in themselves’. We must heed the warning that the linguistic intentionality does not generate or guarantee the existence of the ‘intentional object’, but we must also recognise the epistemologically formative character of intentional language mirroring as it does intentional acts of consciousness. Using the language modern phenomenologists favour we might say that ‘intentionality’ means to describe a ‘datum as meant’, i. e. to be aware that an action includes a reach for some specific meaning or meaningful content.²³⁵

For instance, when asked, “Why are you doing such and such?”,²³⁶ a *yogi* will generally answer by citing a variety of theologically-loaded beliefs that have shaped his experience. Katz explains why this is so important: the object ‘contained’ in experience must be taken into consideration when the mystic’s experiences are interpreted, because the object itself gives character to the experience. For example:

When Smith says ‘I experience *x*’ he is not only involved in the sort of epistemological procedures that we have just discussed, i.e. that the mind is active in constructing *x* as experienced, but he is also asserting that there is an *x* to be experienced. In other words, mystics and students of mysticism have to recognize that mystical experience is not (putatively) solely the act of the conditioned experience as constituted from the side of the experiencer, but is also constituted and conditioned by what the *object* or ‘state of affairs’ is that the mystic (believes he) encounters or experiences.²³⁷

Katz presents this as a “known aspect of mystical experience”, an aspect that displays the “full content of the concept of experience”.²³⁸ From an ordinary realistic position, mystical experience is not only shaped by the conditions of the experiencer, but also by the ‘object’ the mystic “believes he” encounters in his experience. “To say that ‘Smith experiences *x*’ is also to recognize that this experience is in part dependent on what *x* is”.²³⁹ But there is a ‘rub’:

²³⁵ Katz 1978a, p. 63.

²³⁶ Katz 1978a, p. 63.

²³⁷ Katz 1978a, p. 64.

²³⁸ Katz 1978a, p. 64.

²³⁹ Katz 1978a, p. 64.

...the recognition also requires the additional awareness of the complexity of the situation in that what 'x is' is itself, at least partly, determined by a contextual consciousness.²⁴⁰

The epistemological concerns that point to *differences* between mystical experiences have been proffered by Katz. As he sees it, experience is *largely* shaped by contextual factors such as pre-experiential socio-religious conceptual structures, and *partly* by the *object* of experience, which is also *partly* 'determined by a contextual consciousness'.

Katz concludes section three of "Language, epistemology and mysticism" by confirming and reiterating his original 'plea for the recognition of differences'.

Moreover, to take account of the differing objects of experience is to recognize of necessity the difference of the experiences themselves – even if these differences are themselves at least partly contributed to 'reality' at an earlier or parallel stage.²⁴¹

Section IV

Three major points are made in this final section that reflect the fundamental aims of "Language, epistemology and mysticism":

1. According to Katz, his primary aim has been to outline an alternate interpretive approach to the "data", with a specific focus on freeing common core researchers in the field from preconceptions regarding the sameness or similarity of all mystical experiences:

If mystical experience is always the same or similar in essence, as is so often claimed, then this has to be demonstrated by recourse to, and accurate handling of, the evidence, convincing logical argument, and coherent epistemological procedures. It cannot be shown to be the case merely by supported and/or unsupportable assertions to this effect... nor again can it be demonstrated by prior assumptions on the matter which 'prove' their case in what is essentially circular fashion.²⁴²

²⁴⁰ Katz 1978a, p. 64.

²⁴¹ Katz 1978a, p. 65.

²⁴² Katz 1978a, p. 65. Again, as in the question: "[w]hat ontological or logical reason demands that there be only one experience that is ineffable and paradoxical?" it seems that Katz ascribes the perennialists the idea that all mystical experiences are the *same*

In other words, it is up to the common-core interpreters to prove their point.

2. Katz hopes he has made it clear throughout that he does not hold any given mystical tradition as “superior” or “normative” relative to any other and that he does not have any given dogmatic position to defend. As he explains it, his “sole concern” has been to determine, “recognizing the contextuality of [his] own understanding, what *the mystical evidence* will allow in the way of legitimate philosophical reflection”.²⁴³ In this regard he views his investigation as suggesting that “a wide variety of mystical experiences ... are, at least in respect of some determinative aspects, culturally and ideologically grounded”.²⁴⁴ Having said this, however, he frankly admits his awareness that two lines of research need to be continued:

- (1) further careful, expert, study of specific mystical traditions has to be undertaken to uncover what their characteristics are and especially how they relate to the larger theological milieu out of which they emerge; and
- (2) further fundamental epistemological research into the conditions of mystical experience has to be undertaken in order to lay bare the skeleton of such experience in so far as this is possible.²⁴⁵

It is the latter of these enterprises that Katz considers “especially important, yet all the more neglected”.²⁴⁶

3. Katz believes that strong supporting evidence for his pluralistic understanding of mystical experience is found in the fact that

- ...our position is able to accommodate *all* the evidence which is accounted for by non-pluralistic accounts without being reductionistic, i. e. it is able to do more justice to the specificity of the evidence and its

(numerically identical) and not merely similar with respect to certain qualitative aspects. I believe this to be a totally mistaken interpretation of the perennial position, though I will not provide arguments for this in the present context.

²⁴³ Katz 1978a, p. 65-66.

²⁴⁴ Katz 1978a, p. 66.

²⁴⁵ Katz 1978a, p. 66. The project of ‘laying bare the skeleton’ of such experience sounds strikingly similar to what perennialists do when they point to structural similarities (the common core) between experiences. How ‘laying bare the skeleton’ of ‘such experience’ differs from the perennialist project is not clear at all, though this is not a question that will be addressed here.

²⁴⁶ Katz 1978a, p. 66.

inherent distinctions and disjunctions than can the alternative approaches. That is to say, our account neither (a) overlooks any evidence, nor (b) has any need to simplify the available evidence to make it fit into comparative or comparable categories, nor (c) does it begin with a priori assumptions about the nature of ultimate reality.²⁴⁷

With these concluding remarks on the ‘hermeneutical advantages’ of the pluralistic way, Katz has presented his solution to the problem of common-core interpretations of mystical experience.

The following section of this thesis looks at Katz’s argument in abstract and provides a preliminary glimpse of those aspects that appear to be problematic. With regard to these apparent problem areas, we posted a series of email questions to Katz, seeking clarification. Those questions along with his answers are presented in what follows since they will be used together with Katz’s published writings as source material in the coming analysis.

2.2. Some problems involved in Katz’s position

Although the ideas presented in “Language, epistemology and mysticism” are interconnected – in the sense that they presuppose or imply one another – each will receive individual treatment. What follows is a listing of some of the problematic claims made in Katz’s article (in order of appearance):

- a. Whatever validity mystical experience has, it *does not translate itself into reasons* which can be taken as evidence for a given religious proposition.
- b. One must recognize the *differences* in mystical experiences across traditional boundaries, as opposed to recognizing the *similarities*.
- c. *There are no pure (unmediated) experiences.*
- d. It is *not possible to distinguish between experience and interpretation.*
- e. Experience is *shaped/constructed/determined* by beliefs, expectations, language, religious doctrine, etc...

²⁴⁷ Katz 1978a, p. 66.

f. The *phenomenal characteristics of common-core interpreters are inadequate in delineating mystical experience*, and they also display logical incompatibility and inconclusiveness.

g. *The object of experience (partly) determines what kind of experience the experience is.*

As noted in chapter one, conflicting understandings in Katz's formulation seem to arise when certain of the above claims are juxtaposed. For example, if one posits that a mystical experience is partly determined by the 'object' of that experience (a. above), one appears to be making some sort of 'realist' claim. Such a claim, however, appears to conflict with the contextualist claim that mystical experiences are more or less completely determined by the beliefs, expectations, language, etc. of the given mystic (e. above). This sort of theoretical inconsistency makes it difficult to see how Katz's contextual approach could effectively ascertain whether or not mystical experiences are similar or different (b. above). Katz's claim for the partial involvement of the object of experience is itself complicated because this gives the impression that reality impacts on the mystic in such ways that the experience is individuated by this – i.e., that it makes the mystic's experience what it is; at the same time, Katz posits that the 'object' of the mystic's experience is determined by contextual factors, a view that appears to negate the realism declared in the previous sentence (g. above). Moreover, Katz's conviction that it is not possible to distinguish between experience and interpretation implies that there is no way of knowing the degree to which reality actually influence a mystical experience in terms of determining its character (d. above).

Another apparent flaw in Katz's presentation involves the fact that while he claims that perennialists do not provide adequate criteria for the discernment of mystical from other types of experience, the only alternative he manages to offer is the statement that there are Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, etc. types of mystical experiences. Apart from this, Katz's contextual approach remains confused regarding the degree to which mystical experience is shaped by beliefs, expectations, language, religious doctrine, etc. (e. above) and the degree to which it is shaped by the involvement of the 'object' (g. above).

2.3. Starting the discussion

For the purpose of resolving some of these problems, four sets of questions were sent to Katz via email in October, 2006. The questions were meant to clarify some of these issues, especially considering the types of criticisms Katz's thesis has attracted and the apparent 'misunderstandings' these have involved.

The first set of questions, concerned Katz's single epistemological assumption that there are no pure (unmediated) experiences; the second set, addressed the problem of differentiating between various types of mystical experiences, between mystical and religious experiences, and between mystical and non-mystical experience as well; the third set, concerned the matter of where Katz stands on the question of the cognitivity of mystical experiences, especially given the importance he places on context as a determinant of those experiences; and, the fourth set concerned the propositional content of the notions that mystical experience does not translate into reasons (a. above) and is largely determined by context (e. above), both of which we preliminarily regarded as claims of non-cognitivity.

2.3.1. *Questions Sent to Katz*

To make it easier for the reader, the initial email questions along with Katz's answers will be artificially presented as an interview by inserting Katz's answers after each question – without, of course, changing the content. (The original email format can be found in an Appendix.):

This first set of questions attempts to clarifying the role played by the denial of 'pure experience' in Katz's theory of mysticism:

Q: The first set of questions that arose from my reading concerns the denial of pure experience. My first concern with the proposition "There are NO pure (i.e. unmediated) experiences." was its general character. I have not been able to figure to what extent it determines the content of your theory of interpretation. You state for example, that mystical experience is 'over-determined' by contextual factors. Is this based on the epistemology following from the denial of 'pure experience'? [Q1]

A: Yes. [A1]

Q: If yes, should we treat experience-reports in general as we treat reports of 'mystical experience'? [Q2]

A: No, as we need to recognize that mystical experience is not exactly like "experience in general." But it is not altogether different either. [A2]

Q: If we can conclude that mystical experience is for instance 'non-cognitive' (or not cognition-generating) based on the denial of 'pure experience', can we draw the same conclusion about experience in general? [Q3]

A: I do not hold that mystical experience is non-cognitive. [A3]

Q: What exactly is intended by the expression 'pure/unmediated experience'? In the article from 1978 there are several expressions used for this 'phenomenon', among which 'the given' is one. Is the notion of 'unmediated/pure experience' to be understood as 'the given' of phenomenology as well as the 'intuited' knowledge of Lao Tzu? And is the *Erfarung* without *Erlebnis* of Kant, as well as 'the original flux' of James also included in the denial? [Q4]

A: In answer to your question about "pure/unmediated experience" I mean to refer to a direct form of knowledge of "the thing in itself" without any conceptual (or other) mediation. [A4]

Q: In 'Language, epistemology, and mysticism' the denial of 'pure experience' is first labelled an 'assumption', then an 'epistemological fact' and in 'The conservative character of mystical experience' it is labelled a 'working hypothesis' – what label is most accurate? [Q5]

A: I would think that calling the denial of pure experience "a working hypothesis" is best. I do so because I do not want to be dogmatic about the possibility I am wrong. (Though to date I do not think anyone has shown that I am wrong.) [A5]

Q: What part of the argument is it – is it a conclusion or a premise? What role does the assumption play in the contextual theory as a whole? Is this assumption/working hypothesis/epistemological fact necessary and does the contextual approach depend on the assumption? [Q6]

A: Whether the contextual approach in all forms depends on this "working hypothesis" I am not sure - For myself, however, the answer is yes. This dependency does exist. [A6]

This second set of questions primarily concerns the delimitation of mystical experience and religious experience. Section 1.4 discussed different ways of defining religion and what they imply for the identification of mystical experience, and also for the distinction between religious experience and mystical experience.

Q: The second set of questions concern the delimitation of 'mystical' in experience. Concerning the questions of a common core in mystical experience, you direct a serious amount of criticism towards the ability of 'perennial' interpreters of mystical experience to delineate mystical from other forms of experience. If I understand you correctly, you do not believe there is a common core in mystical experience, and prefer a list of mystical-experience reports as a means of picking out the reports for interpretation. This leaves me wondering: Without the phenomenal characteristics of experience, how is it possible within the contextual model to discern mystical experience from other kinds of experience? There are indications in your article that it is the object of the mystic's experience that makes the experience 'mystical', is that correct? [Q8]

A: Yes. I reject the "Common core" position. This, however, does not preclude distinguishing mystical experience from general experience. Mystical experience has, in each discrete instance, specific phenomenological conditions that mark it as mystical. [A8]

Q: Is there any way to discern between a mystical experience and a religious experience in the contextualist approach of interpretation of mystical reports? [Q9]

A: Yes one can distinguish mystical from religious experience. There will be areas that seem to overlap and about which one can argue but this distinction is not hard to posit. [A9]

Q: I have also wondered what role, if any, the denial of pure experience plays for the conclusion that there is no common core to mystical experience. [Q10]

A: ... the denial of pure experience is for me, separate from, but related to, the denial of the common core claims insofar as these claims are usually of the pure experience variety. [A10]

The third set of questions concerns the epistemological foundation for a contextual-realist theory of mystical experience of the type Katz is proposing.

Q: A third important issue that has also been reflected in the critical reviews of your article concerns the over-determination of experience. Keeping in mind that you consider experience 'over-determined' by contextual/historical/psychological/linguistic factors, I was surprised to find that you also think that "beliefs shape experience, just as experience shapes beliefs". To me this seems contradictory, on account of the following: How can experience *shape* beliefs when experience is 'over-determined' by belief and other contextual factors? It seems that on the contextual approach the 'over-determination' of experience stretches to encapsulate all aspects of it, including the autonomy that experience would require to 'shape' anything. What does the autonomy of experience consist in when it 'shapes beliefs'? [Q11]

A: As to my view that "experience shapes belief" as well as the contrary - to deny this would be to deny reality, i.e., novelty, and the possibility - at least - of radical novelty. I think, that one must at least allow for these possibilities in religious (as well as other) forms of life and experience. [A11]

Q: Taking the 'over-determination' of experience as a dominant characteristic, I have also wondered what it is that the mystics interpret when they have 'mystical' experiences. What is the object of their interpretation? [Q12]

A: I do not want to deny the reality of mystical experience - this I grant, as a given from which one proceeds. I begin by allowing the claim for the Ultimate Object - whatever that is - as claimed by the mystic. I then ask: "Why does He or She know Reality (whatever it is) the way that they do?" Thus I never deny the object of the claims for mystical experience whatever the Object claimed is. [A12]

This final question concerns the claimed cognitivity of mystical experience, a claim that appears unsupported by Katz's contextual theory of mystical experience.

Q: A final question that has puzzled me is whether you consider that mystical experiences are cognitive or not. That the mystical experience can not be "translated into reasons" I have interpreted as "mystical experiences are non-cognitive". Some of your interpreters claim this is not so. Do you consider the mystical experiences cognitive or cognition-generating? [Q13]

A: No - you have misinterpreted my view that mystical experience cannot be "translated into reasons" as meaning they are non-cognitive. The cognitive nature of these claims is not the issue - one can have cognitive claims that are not verifiable and thus cannot serve as decisive proof of an argument. Cognitivity and verifiability, etc., are concepts that must be distinguished. You conflate them incorrectly. [A13]

2.3.2. Concluding remarks

The above series of questions and answers shall be viewed as part of the source material since it will be used in later chapters as the basis for certain conclusions. Unfortunately, several issues remain unclarified since they are not covered in Katz's replies. It would be interesting, for instance, to learn more about how Katz differentiates between mystical and religious experience, and how the religious/mystical is distinguished from the 'secular' in his contextual model. Moreover, his attempt to combine a contextualist model with realist intentions also bears closer scrutiny, since the two notions seem mutually exclusive and thus contradictory. We would also be interested to know what those 'phenomenological conditions' are that mark a mystical experience as specifically mystical. Most of these issues will be discussed in the coming chapters, which will aim at a deeper understanding of Katz's theory and an analysis of how the interpretation mysticism can be advanced.

Part III: Analysis

Chapter 3

The nature of mystical experience

Introduction to chapter three

... there's a war in the mind, over territory
For the dominion
Who will dominate the opinion
Schisms and isms, keepin' us in forms of religion
Conformin' our vision
To the world churches decision
Trapped in a section
Submitted to committing election
Moral infection

Lauren Hill

This chapter focuses on an analysis of Katz's rejection of the phenomenal characteristics as a valid means of delimiting mysticism. From the outset, however, it is important to keep in mind the gap that exists between the first-hand interpretations of mystics (who are at some point or another interpreting their own experiences) and various types of second-hand interpretations (the interpretations of these experiential reports). Katz's own awareness of this gap is indicated in both "Language, epistemology, and mysticism" and "Mystical speech and mystical meaning".²⁴⁸ Much of the argumentation concerning which

²⁴⁸ Katz distinguishes between "(a) the first person report of the mystic; (b) the mystic's 'interpretation' of his own experience at some later, more reflective, and mediated, stage; (c) the 'interpretation' of third persons within the same tradition (Christians on

theoretical framework is best for interpreting mystical experience concentrates on how the details of the mystic's first-hand interpretation of her own experience is to be understood. This is exemplified by the following two quotes from Katz regarding a central point of his contextual approach:

...this process of differentiation of mystical experience into the patterns and symbols of established religious communities is experiential and does not only take place in the post-experiential process of reporting and interpreting the experience itself: it is at work *before, during and after* the experience.²⁴⁹

Thus,

...in order to understand mysticism it is *not* just a question of studying the reports of the mystic after the experiential event but of acknowledging that the experience itself as well as the form in which it is reported is *shaped by concepts which the mystic brings to, and which shape, his experience.*²⁵⁰

This highlights a major distinction between Katz's approach and that of the perennialists. In Katz's epistemology of mysticism, the mystic's experiential interpretation occurs at all times – before, during and after the mystical experience; in the perennial account, however, there is recognition of the presence of ambiguous experiential phenomena which are interpreted by the experiencer through either religiously or secularly acquired interpretive models. This is what Paul Elmer More means when he insists that:

There is thus a ground of psychological experience, potential in all men, actually realized in a few, common to all mystics of all lands and times and accountable for the similarity of their reports. But upon that common basis, we need not be surprised to see them also erecting various superstructures in accordance with their particular tenets of philosophy or religion. At bottom their actual experiences, at the highest point at least, will be amazingly alike, but their theories in regard to what has happened to them may be radically different.²⁵¹

Christian mysticism); (d) the process of interpretation by third persons in other traditions (Buddhists on Christianity); and so on.” (Katz 1978a, p. 23)

²⁴⁹ Katz 1978a, p. 27.

²⁵⁰ Katz 1978a, p. 26.

²⁵¹ Paul Elmer More quoted in Pike 1993, p. 87.

This sharp contrast between the contextualist and the perennialist models is expressed by Katz in his central thesis that there are no pure experiences, that the interpretative functions are never inactivated, that it is impossible to distinguish between experience and interpretation and that there are *differences* rather than *similarities* among mystical experiences. Katz pleads for “the recognition of differences” in the experiences of mystics and offers a contextual alternative to the common core interpretations of the perennialists. This chapter comprises an examination of Katz’s theoretical justification for interpreting various mystical experiences as being fundamentally *different* from, rather than *similar* to, one another.

Katz’s arguments against the perennial interpretation of ‘sameness’ involve several interrelated problems, each of which will be examined in due course. In this regard, a principal point of concern revolves around the question of whether or not Katz’s theory is genuinely able to distinguish mystical experience from other types of experience – i.e., whether or not his theory includes precise demarcation standards. For his part, Katz seems to propose that it is the ‘object’ of experience that one should look to in order to establish appropriate demarcation standards. In attempting to address the problem of the ‘object’ in Katz’s understanding one is invariably led to a detailed examination of his realism in terms of the following questions:

- 1) When Katz speaks of the ‘object’ that the mystic supposedly encounters and that makes the mystic’s experience what it is, is he talking about an existing real object, what we have called an ‘irreal’ object (a non-existing, merely imagined real object) or an intentional object in the phenomenological sense?
- 2) Does Katz’s realism contradict his contextualism, thus jeopardising the theoretical consistency of his overall approach?
- 3) Can Katz’s realism function as a valid basis for making claims of difference or similarity in the experiences of mystics?

The following analysis also includes a discussion regarding Katz’s grounds for rejecting the perennial criteria of identification as well as the claim of similarity across mystical experiences. This discussion relates to

the further question of whether or not Katzian contextualism is actually capable of extending the understanding of the field.

3.1. Sameness and difference in experience

Because Katz's 'plea for the recognition of differences' plays such an important role in his theory, the issue of 'sameness' and 'difference' will be at the centre of discussion throughout the analysis of his contextual approach. In section 1.4 we discussed the possible sense Katz gives to the notion of mystical experience, and in chapter two we examined Katz's view that the 'object' of experience is at least partially involved in determining what the experience is:

When Smith says 'I experience x ' he is not only involved in the sort of epistemological procedures that we have just discussed, i.e. that the mind is active in constructing x as experienced, but he is also asserting that there is an x to be experienced. In other words, mystics and students of mysticism have to recognize that mystical experience is not (putatively) solely the act of the conditioned experience as constituted from the side of the experienter, but is also constituted and conditioned by what the *object* or 'state of affairs' is that the mystic (believes he) encounters or experiences.²⁵²

At the same time, he believes that the object of experience is at least partially determined by "contextual consciousness":

...the recognition also requires the additional awareness of the complexity of the situation in that what ' x is' is itself, at least partly, determined by a contextual consciousness.²⁵³

Since in Katz's philosophy, it appears to be the object which determines that mystical experiences are not the same but different, it is both interesting and highly relevant to ascertain what possible 'objects' would make different experiences *typically* mystical (different from *ordinary* experience) and yet so instrumentally fine that they could help distinguish *different* types of mystical experience.²⁵⁴ In attempting to

²⁵² Katz 1978a, p. 64.

²⁵³ Katz 1978a, p. 64.

²⁵⁴ This is also a distinction that Katz wishes to maintain, although, as we have seen, he is not very specific about which "phenomenological conditions" demarcate mystical experience: "we need to recognize that mystical experience is not exactly like

ascertain Katz's understanding of what type of object the mystic encounters that makes her experience *specifically mystical* (as opposed to both 'ordinary' and 'religious'), yet distinctively *non-similar* to the other members of its class, we will examine the compatibility of Katz's theory with the three notions of 'object' constructed in chapter one: i.e., *intentional* objects, *irreal* objects and *real* objects.

Since the realism and contextualism in Katz's theory seem incompatible (a matter to be discussed in the next section), it is necessary to separate the implications of assuming that the mystic encounters a *real* object from those involved in assuming that the objects in mystical experience are *irreal* (or subjective constructions). A third possibility is that Katz is referring to 'phenomenal', or as we have termed them, 'intentional' objects. This third possibility implies that Katz would actually be able to construct demarcation standards and make judgements concerning similarity and difference in experience. Thus our first point of consideration will be the question of whether or not the 'objects' that, in Katz's view, demarcate mystical experiences are *intentional objects* as defined in chapter 1.

Before considering this, however, a fourth possibility must be examined first: William P. Gregory's suggestion that Katz does not necessarily imply that an object is involved in the experiences of mystics. Here Gregory's line of reasoning belongs to the discussion concerning the possibility of 'pure experience'. Pure experience has often been conceptualized as an 'object-less' or 'non-intentional' experience. If Katz is denying the possibility of 'object-less' experiences, he seems to be

'experience in general.' But it is not altogether different either." (See A2 in section 2.2.) and "This, however, does not preclude distinguishing mystical experience from general experience. Mystical experience has, in each discrete instance, specific phenomenological conditions that mark it as mystical." Additionally, Katz claims that mystical experiences can be distinguished from religious experiences: "Yes one can distinguish mystical from religious experience. There will be areas that seem to overlap and about which one can argue, but this distinction is not hard to posit." (A9) The major problem here is that if the experiences of mystics are conditioned (or determined) by the 'religious context' and mystics experience 'religious objects', and if this is viewed as the basis of pleading for the recognition of differences, it seems impossible to say whether an experience is 'mystical' or 'religious' (as we have discussed in section 1.4).

contradicting many of the reports which, at least in the perennial accounts, qualify as reports of mystical experience. When interpreted as a rejection of the possibility of 'object-less' experience, Katz's rejection of the possibility of pure experience has also been regarded as a theory that rejects the possibility of the fundamental Buddhist experience of *nirvana*. This, of course, could be seen as a failure to *show regard for the validity of Buddhist self-understanding*.

This is Gregory's interpretation:

His manner of describing mystical experiences as having 'objects,' for example, is not meant to suggest that mystical consciousness is in all circumstances precisely an intentional mode of awareness involving a subject perceiving an object – a claim that is problematic in any number of mystical traditions. Rather, it is to suggest that mystics have experiences of 'something' that, on the one hand, transcends their limited subjectivities and, on the other hand, possesses a specific character or set of qualities which individuate the experience from other experiences. His reference to nirvana as the 'object' of the Buddhist mystic's experience, for example, is not meant to contradict the fundamental assertion of Buddhism that nirvana is a state of awareness that transcends all subject-object duality. In referencing nirvana Katz actually tries very hard not to transgress the acceptable theological parameters of Buddhist descriptions of it. Nevertheless, he has a point to get across which certainly is itself not contrary to Buddhism, and he uses the language available to him to make it: whatever the right way of characterizing whether 'nirvana' or the 'nirvanization' of the Buddhist mystic's consciousness may be, the fact is that the enlightened Buddhist mystic has an experience or undergoes a transformation, and whatever that transformation is, it is not nothing and it does not go unnoticed. Something really happens, and in not being nothing and in something really happening, nirvana is in this sense – however one best wants to qualify this – is the 'object' of the Buddhist mystic's experience.²⁵⁵

If the term 'object' is as 'loosely' used in Katz's terminology as Gregory suggests, we will not be able to make any use of it whatsoever.

Gregory goes even further by suggesting that Katz uses the terms 'object' and 'content' to designate the *character* of mystical experience:

²⁵⁵ Gregory 2006, p. 269.

The same could be said about the form of other claims Katz makes. His reference to the 'content' of mystical experience, for example, often raises objections from proponents of pure consciousness and other similar events who insist that it is possible to achieve a state of experience in which there are no 'objects' or 'contents' of any sort. But Katz, in this specific use of language of his, is once again simply asserting that every mystical experience has a specific *character* and this is its 'content,' even if such 'content' is best characterized as an 'empty' or 'contentless' mode of consciousness.²⁵⁶

Clearly there is a problem with interpreting Katz in this way: if a contentless experience has a 'content', namely 'contentlessness', not only is the word 'content' deprived of all meaning, but there appears to be nothing left of the controversy between Katz and the perennialists. The notion that there are no content-less experiences is the primary basis of Katz's position on mysticism, from which he draws conclusions about the experiences of mystics that contradict the conclusions and results of perennial investigators. In Gregory's interpretation nothing remains of this, and even though we cannot tell whether it is an interpretation that Katz would accept, we must either reject it or conclude that Katz's theory is, itself, without a content.

In Katz's theory, it is the different 'objects' that are responsible for mystical experiences' not being the *same* but *different*. We first examine whether or not the 'objects' that Katz insists are involved in mystical experiences should be viewed as *intentional objects*. To begin with it should be made clear that the mere fact that Katz 'heeds the warning' that "linguistic intentionality does not generate or guarantee the existence of the 'intentional object'"²⁵⁷ is not enough to confirm that the objects he refers to are 'intentional objects' as defined in this thesis. There are, in fact, many reasons *not* to apply a phenomenological understanding to Katz's use of the term 'object': 1) Katz's rejection of the phenomenological method, which implies that his usage of the term 'object' very likely refers to some sort of metaphysical system; 2) his rejection of phenomenological results because of their apparently 'subjective' character, and (3) his rejection of the phenomenal

²⁵⁶ Gregory 2006, p 270

²⁵⁷ Katz 1978a, p. 63.

characteristics of mystical experience on the grounds that they are too general and thus unable to delineate what that experience is. These points will be dealt with in the following subsection, while Section 3.2 returns to the problem of Katz's inclusion of both realism and contextualism in his approach.

3.1.1. Katz's notion of intentionality and intentional objects

Katz's rejection of the phenomenological method includes a direct reference to his realist position. His point is that phenomenological results are 'subjective' because phenomenologists think that through their methods they can arrive at 'objective truth'. Gregory also makes mention of this aspect of Katz's thought:

In addition to acknowledging that his own theological judgements in relation to history are not decisively proven, he criticises phenomenologists, for example, for believing that they could arrive at objective metaphysical truths in their reflections on the structure of existence and the world. To them he replies that the metaphysical structure of the real is neither "given" nor "self-evident" and their claims about it in turn are not judgements of an objective philosophical sort, but more subjective "intuitions." The procedure that holds to the "direct apprehension of certain metaphysical, ontological, cognitive, and moral truths," he writes, "... is deficient."²⁵⁸

Clearly there is a misunderstanding here, although its origin is not clear. Perhaps it would help to know who these phenomenologists are that think they can arrive at "objective metaphysical truths in their reflections on the structure and existence of the world". The more likely explanation is, however, that Katz has seriously misinterpreted the phenomenological project. Since the primary aim of phenomenology is to analyse *experience* and not to arrive at metaphysical truths (which, by the way, are bracketed), Katz seems to be arguing against a straw man. Indeed Katz's criticism of the phenomenologists is strikingly similar to Husserl's criticism of the naïve scientific realism. *All* experience is 'subjective', and questions concerning the correlation between subjective experience and objective reality have been pondered since the dawn of man; yet still they remain at the centre of most philosophical and

²⁵⁸ Gregory 2006, p. 70.

scientific debates. Husserl's point is that natural science cannot escape the subjective character of experience. Even in the sacrosanct realm of 'observation' and 'measurement' the subjectivity of the scientist is involved, and this is a primary reason that phenomenologists go about examining 'subjectivity' – i.e., the functional elements and characteristics of *experience*. From this it appears that Katz is philosophically inclined towards the *actual* phenomenological approach, but rejects it because of a fundamental misunderstanding of its aim and intent.

This is confirmed in Katz's description of the processes involved in experience. This description is a central part of Katz's epistemology, in which Katz associates the notion of 'the given' with the notion of 'pure experience':

Closely allied to the erroneous contention that we can achieve a state of pure consciousness is the oft used notion of the 'given' or the 'suchness' or the 'real' to describe the pure state of mystical experience which transcends all contextual epistemological colourings. But what sense do these terms have? What is the 'given' or the 'suchness' or even the 'real'? Analysis of these terms indicate their relativity; they are applied to a variety of alternative and even mutually exclusive 'states of affairs' and 'states of no affairs'. This variety itself should alert us to the real danger and arbitrariness involved in this gambit. Phenomenologists seem especially prone to this fruitless naivety - all intuit the 'given' but their intuitions differ significantly. It can fairly be said that no attempt to state clearly or individuate the 'given' has succeeded. Indeed, talk of the 'given' seems to be a move made to short circuit the very sort of epistemological inquiry here being engaged in, but such a move fails because there is no evidence that there is any 'given' which can be disclosed without the imposition of the mediating conditions of the knower. All 'givens' are also the product of the process of 'choosing', 'shaping', and 'receiving'. That is, the 'given' is appropriated through acts which shape it into forms which we can make intelligible to ourselves given our conceptual constitution, and which structure it in order to respond to the specific contextual needs and mechanisms of consciousness of the receiver.²⁵⁹

Here, arguing on the basis of his own misunderstanding, Katz criticises phenomenologists for 'mistakenly' thinking that they can "individuate the 'given'" and then offers a description of the experiential process that

²⁵⁹ Katz 1978, p. 59.

could have been just as easily given by a phenomenologist. The statement that the ‘given’ (the ineffable *hyle* in phenomenological terms) is “appropriated through acts which shape it into forms which we can make intelligible to ourselves” sounds very much like a phenomenological description of ordinary experience.

Setting labels aside and focusing on the content of Katz’s claims, why not then interpret his account of ‘intentional object’ as a phenomenological account? The answer is that there is a problem with Katz’s formulation that goes beyond what he thinks phenomenologists do: in Katz’s account, the ‘given’ is the “the *product* of the process of ‘choosing’, ‘shaping’, and ‘receiving’” and not a constitutive part of experience. This understanding of the ‘given’ causes difficulty for Katz’s realist claim; interestingly enough, it is also the understanding he uses in his argument against the phenomenological method. If Katz claims that the ‘given’ is a product of our processes of thought, then this understanding is obviously incompatible with any realist claim. Katz describes his position as a realist one, and although a phenomenological approach is compatible with a realist position (which could be yet another reason to assume that Katz’s position is similar to the phenomenologists), Katz rejects this approach because he considers the results following from the phenomenological method to be ‘subjective impressions’ that are different in content. In addition to his claim that “no attempt to state clearly or individuate the ‘given’ has succeeded”, Katz calls critical attention to the inability of phenomenologists to intuit the same thing, viewing this as a fundamental flaw in their method:

...every phenomenologist seems to intuit as the ‘essence’ of things something quite different from his phenomenological colleagues. The result of the intuiting is only a coterie of unverifiable subjective impressions which seem to owe as much to what the particular phenomenologist *wants* to ‘intuit’ (i.e. he seems to find what he was looking for) as to any truly independent route-finding procedure into the nature of things. ... We have no trust in the phenomenological method.²⁶⁰

Katz thus seems to equate ‘different’ with ‘subjective’ and ‘irreal’. We return to the question of how Katz manages to resolve the conflict between his contextualist and his realist ideas, but for now it seems that

²⁶⁰ Katz quoted from Gregory 2006, p. 70.

we must interpret Katz as rejecting phenomenology because of the alleged ‘subjective’ or ‘non-realistic’ character of the conclusions that result from its methods. Here Katz seems to wrongly assume that all phenomenologists intuit essences and make claims about metaphysical truths, features that dissuade him from using the phenomenological method as a tool.²⁶¹ Ironically, it is phenomenology minus Katz’s misconceptions that would actually be compatible with his realist inclinations. To use the term ‘intentional object’ as it is defined in chapter one, would leave room not only for a realist approach, but also for the possibility of demarcating mystical experience from other types of experience. This is because the individuation of phenomena of experience in terms of similarity and difference is ultimately based on the phenomenal qualities that an experience has.

The argument that the objectivity of phenomenologists should be rejected because their ‘intuitions’ *differ in content* is closely related to the argument Katz gives for rejecting the phenomenal characteristics compiled by perennialists to categorize types of experience:

Careful inspection thus shows that while lists of supposed phenomenological characteristics seem to help in delineating what mystical experience is, and also in establishing what ties seemingly different experiences together as a class of like experience, such lists, in fact, are so general that even though they serve to exclude certain types of experience as, for a bizarre example, contemplating one’s navel, as a

²⁶¹ “Intuiting of essences” can certainly be a part of the phenomenologist’s efforts, though it is difficult to say whether Katz fully understands the meaning of this expression in the phenomenological context. In Husserl’s use, *Anschauung* reflects the particular understanding of terms that cannot be found in sensual perception, and their meaning is thus necessarily ‘intuited’ as opposed to ‘experienced’. Terms like ‘unity’, ‘number’ and ‘similarity’ cannot possibly correspond to a particular sense datum, so their meaning is therefore ‘intuited’. (See Spiegelberg’s discussion in Spiegelberg 1976, p. 118) Concerning ‘essences’, they are described by Spiegelberg as “the whatness of things as opposed to their thatness, i.e., their existence” (Spiegelberg 1976, p. 716). *Wesensschau* is further defined as: “intuiting of essences and essential relations” (Spiegelberg 1976, p. 728). What point there is in claiming that “...every phenomenologist seems to intuit as the ‘essence’ of things something quite different from his phenomenological colleagues” is hardly clear in light of the definitions given above. It would be absurd to assume that all things have the same ‘essence’ so that all phenomenologists would intuit the “essence of things” as the *same* essence.

mystical experience, they remain so general as not to suffice to delineate what mystical experience actually is, nor again are they sophisticated in their recognition of the contextual basis of language and thus are incapable of sorting out the actual meaning of mystical reports.²⁶²

The fact that the characteristics are too general in the sense that they can and have been applied to more than one object is the standard argument employed by Katz in his refutation of the phenomenal characteristics of experience. However, if it is not the phenomenal characteristics that individuate the experience, but rather the ‘object’ of experience, this ‘object’ cannot be the ‘intentional object’ that we have described.

In summary, the intentional object is constituted by way of *morphe* (pure forms) and *hyle* (ineffable material), and if we consider *morphe* too general to ‘delineate’ an experience, we do no better with *hyle*: in itself *hyle* is nothing but unconstituted matter (and thus non-demarcational, or impossible to differentiate in terms of similarity and difference). As Katz also notes, ‘the given’ is made accessible through the ‘forms’ of understanding. The single tool we have for distinguishing between elements of experience in terms of similarity and difference are the forms – the forms that Katz rejects as too general.

When asked about the possibility of distinguishing mystical experience from ordinary experience, Katz replies:

Mystical experience has, in each discrete instance, specific phenomenological conditions that mark it as mystical.²⁶³

This seems to indicate the possibility of differentiating mystical experience from other types of experience by way of phenomenal conditions, but Katz never bothers to make plain what those “specific phenomenological conditions” might be. One thing at least is certain: they cannot be the characteristics outlined by Stace since these have already been rejected by Katz. Let us take a brief look at these rejected characteristics before moving on to the problem of the ‘object’ that is said to demarcate mystical from ordinary experience, and Katz’s inability to combine both realist and contextualist understandings in his approach.

²⁶² Katz 1978a, p. 51.

²⁶³ See A8 in section 2.2.

3.1.2. The phenomenal characteristics rejected

On the one hand, Katz appears to reject the phenomenal characteristics listed by Stace and other ‘perennial’ interpreters of mysticism; on the other hand, he appears to hold out the possibility that there are “specific phenomenological conditions that mark [an experience] as mystical”. Since Katz never seems to indicate what these ‘conditions’ are, let us look at what he clearly indicates they are not.

In “Language, epistemology and mysticism” Katz rejects as inadequate the following phenomenal characteristics – all taken from Stace:²⁶⁴

- The quality of ‘unity’
- The quality of ‘objectivity’ or ‘reality’
- The quality of ‘peace’
- The quality of ‘nonspatiality’ and ‘nontemporality’
- The quality of ‘holiness’
- The quality of ‘paradoxicality’
- The quality of ‘ineffability’²⁶⁵

Throughout his discussion on these various characteristics, Katz appears to be considering them as necessarily intentional – or necessarily ‘containing an object’. Let us look in greater detail at two of these characteristics as well as Katz’s grounds for rejecting them.

In section 1.4 we briefly discussed ‘mystic union’ and the theological elements that make it potentially heretical to particular religious systems.

²⁶⁴ The points are listed in Katz 1978a, p 50, and are, in fact, collected from two overlapping lists that respect Stace’s distinction between ‘introvertive’ and ‘extrovertive’ mystical experience. For purposes of this discussion we do not find it relevant to make such a distinction, and it does not seem to have been relevant to Katz either, since he rejects both lists on the same basis regardless of this distinction.

²⁶⁵ Stace does not consider all the characteristics to be necessary for every mystical experience, but prefers to describe them in terms of ‘family resemblance’: “It has been too readily taken for granted by writers on mysticism that all ‘mystical’ states must necessarily have common characteristics to justify the application of the one word to them. But as the Wittgensteinians have recently been insisting, the multifarious objects or phenomena which are all called by one name may be thus grouped together, not because of an identity of common qualities, but only because they bear to one another a relation of ‘family resemblance’” (Stace 1960, p. 46.).

The ontological considerations connected to this are not relevant from a phenomenological perspective: an experience may very well be thought of as ‘unitive’ without implying anything about the properties of a transcendental reality or ‘entity’. In his essay on the phenomenology of mystic union, Nelson Pike categorizes this unitive experience as an experience that lacks the “subject-object structure” that experiences generally have. The lack of subject-object structure not only implies that the ‘object’ is missing from the structure, but that the ‘subject’ disappears as well. Pike describes how he draws this conclusion as follows:

In chapter XI of the *Book of Supreme Truth*, Ruysbroeck relates an experience in which the mystic is totally occupied with a single object (God), which he then distinguishes from himself. Using the repertoire of concepts just introduced: God is here experienced as a not-me that stands in contrast to the experiencing subject. The experience has what I shall call ‘subject-object structure.’ In chapter XII of the same text however, Ruysbroeck goes on to describe the succeeding experiential interval as a state of (what he calls) ‘solitude.’ This is to say, I think, that in this interval of experience, the mystic does not pick out an object that is distinguished from self. Experientially, the mystic is not in the company of another. Framed in the language of the theory we are using, this is to say that in this moment of experience, nothing is discerned as a not-me, and thus the experience as a whole is also bereft of a sense of self. And so it is in Ruysbroeck’s account as well. Ruysbroeck says that in the union without distinction ‘uplifted spirits are melted and naughted.’ As I read this sentence, Ruysbroeck is saying that an awareness of self is not a part of this moment of experience.²⁶⁶

Experiences in which there is neither an awareness of the self nor of the ‘object’ as being separated from the self are strikingly similar to descriptions of the states acquired in different religious traditions. In Gregory’s defence of Katz’s theory, he suggests that Katz does not claim that experience cannot be of nothing – i.e., that it must necessarily contain an object – but rather that the whole of ‘experience’ is the ‘object’ of the mystic’s description. This interpretation of Katz, however, does not appear correct. Here is an example of the principal reason why.

For Katz, it is one thing to say, as Pike does, that Ruysbroeck’s experience is a ‘totally unitive’ experience in which dichotomies between

²⁶⁶ Pike 1993, p 32

self and object disappear, but it is quite another to equate this ‘type’ of experiencing with, for instance, the Buddhist notion of ‘nothingness’. According to Katz, this latter alternative is out of the question because the term ‘nothingness’, according to Katz, covers different ontic realities:

Even agreeing that in two or more cases the term ‘nothingness’ is being used in the sense of an objective ontological reference, there is still no surety that the term is being used in synonymous ways. One has to ask whether the various experiences of ‘nothingness’ are similar or dissimilar experiences of the *same* phenomenon, i.e. ‘nothingness’, or *different* experiences of different phenomena, i.e. ‘nothingness’ is a term which is used to cover alternative ontic realities. In this latter instance which seems to fit at least a substantial segment of the data of mystical experience more adequately, the difference between the cases is a difference between *what* is experienced not just *how* something is experienced. The appropriateness of this schema, i.e. that the term is used to cover differing ontic ‘states of affairs’, recommends itself because to hold that it is just a case of *how* one experiences a common reality, one would have to have a sufficiently delimiting list of corresponding and agreed predicates that the experienced object possessed in both (or more) cases which are being compared.²⁶⁷

We wonder then, not only how the (object-less but not self-less) anxiety of one man can be deemed either different or similar in comparison to the anxiety of another, but also, what exact predicates can be ascribed to ‘nothingness’ if, as Katz apparently argues, we should view ‘nothingness’ as an object (the *what*) in the mystic’s experience. Katz recognizes the distinction between the ‘how’ and the ‘what’ in experience, but rejects the ‘how’ because the “substantial segment of the data of mystical experience”²⁶⁸ more adequately ‘fits’ the ‘what’. He thus seems to say that mystical experience is necessarily connected to a metaphysical system of beliefs. However, this same “substantial segment of the data of mystical experience” (i.e., the mystical reports) is used by Pike, Forman and many others to confirm that it is the ‘how’ that can differentiate experiences, and not the ‘what’, especially since the reports contain explicit references to the fact that the experience does not involve a ‘what’ at all.

²⁶⁷ Katz 1978a, p. 52.

²⁶⁸ Katz 1978a, p. 52.

All the above points and how they relate to mysticism and mystical experience could readily be discussed at length. However, since this has already been done by Stace,²⁶⁹ our focus will be on Katz's attempted refutation of two of these phenomenal characteristics (considered as typical of his attempts to refute other characteristics as well): the "sense of objectivity or reality" and "ineffability".

The first of these two characteristics, the "sense of objectivity or reality", is connected to our ongoing discussion concerning Katz's realism. In the perennial lists discussed at the beginning of section 3.2. it frequently appears among the common characteristic of mystical experience. This is rejected by Katz on the following grounds:

While it is the case that all mystics claim that theirs is an experience of reality – actually a reality with a capital R – this seemingly common claim provides no basis for Stace's extreme conclusion about the 'universal common characteristics of mysticism'. It does not because the terms 'objectivity' and 'reality' are notoriously elusive as they are seductive. Every system and every mystic had made claims to ultimate objectivity and to discovered Reality, but their claims are more often than not mutually incompatible. For example, while objectivity or reality (Reality)

²⁶⁹ Stace does so in "Mysticism and language" (1960). Stace sums up the characteristics on p. 79. William James identifies four (phenomenological) characteristics for the delimitation of mystical experience: 'ineffability', 'noetic quality', 'transcendency' and 'passivity of the experiencing subject'. Lists of similar phenomenological features are also presented: Stace quotes R. M. Bucke's seven features: "(1) the subjective light, or photism, (2) moral elevation, (3) intellectual illumination, (4) sense of immortality, (5) loss of fear of death, (6) loss of sense of sin, (7) suddenness"; he then quotes D. T. Suzuki's eight: "(1) irrationality, inexplicability, incommunicability; (2) intuitive insight; (3) authoritativeness; (4) affirmation (positive character); (5) sense of the beyond; (6) impersonal tone; (7) feeling of exaltation; (8) momentariness (roughly equivalent to Bucke's 'suddenness')"; and finally he presents his own seven: "1. The unifying vision, expressed abstractly by the formula 'All is One.' The One is, in extrovertive mysticism, perceived through the physical senses, in or through the multiplicity of objects. 2. The more concrete apprehension of the One as being an inner subjectivity in all things, described variously as life, or consciousness, or a living Presence. The discovery that nothing is 'really' dead. 3. Sense of objectivity or reality. 4. Feeling of blessedness, joy, happiness, satisfaction, etc. 5. Feeling that what is apprehended is holy, or sacred, or divine. This is the quality which gives rise to the interpretation of the experience as being an experience of 'God.' It is the specifically religious element in the experience. It is closely intertwined with, but not identical with, the previously listed characteristic of blessedness and joy. 6. Paradoxicality. [...] 7. Alleged by mystics to be ineffable, incapable of being described in words, etc."

in Plato and Neoplatonism is found in the 'world of Ideas', these characteristics are found in God in Jewish mysticism and again in the *Tao*, *nirvana*, and Nature, in Taoism, Buddhism, and Richard Jefferies respectively. It seems clear that these respective mystics do not experience the same Reality or objectivity, and therefore, it is not reasonable to posit that their respective experiences of Reality or objectivity are similar. As presumably few of my readers have had a mystical experience, perhaps this point can be reinforced by comparing the terms 'Reality' in, say Marxism, where Reality is equated with the economic and the material, as against Freudianism where Reality is defined in terms of the psychological or alternatively in empiricism where Reality is equivalent to the sensible or that which is derived from the sensible as compared to the Idealist 'Reality' which is ideational and non-sensible.²⁷⁰

Clearly Katz conceives of this 'quality of realness' not as a 'how', but as a 'what', a likely cause of the confusion displayed here. Should one regard Plato's theory that Ideas are ultimately Real as an experience-based predication or a theoretical construct of Ultimate Reality? Or the Buddhist mystic's state of *nirvana* as an ontological setting of Ultimate Reality? And when did Marx report *experiencing* that the primarily Real is 'economy and matter', or Freud that the Ultimate is a 'psychological' entity such as the 'libido'? Katz refers to theoretical structures or models of reality, not the experiences of mystics (or common men), some of which have been religious in character. What these systems of belief may contribute to the understanding of particular instances of experienced 'reality' is thoroughly outlined by Katz. And if Katz is right that nobody can undo the automatic inset of a Marxist interpretive pattern or a Freudian interpretive pattern, then the Marxist experiences his world as an economic and material world in which there is no room for the primacy of ideal entities that the Platonist would experience in his world (compare to the discussion in section 1.4). And the Freudian, whether he is aware of it or not, must interpret the Reality of 'God as Father' into all individuals that display 'signs' of religiousness. But these are 'existential judgements', and experience does not need 'existential judgements' to exist. Katz, of course, would disagree since, in his view, there is no way to overcome the ontic commitments of the experiencer. In reaction, the perennial philosopher Robert Forman remarks that no one disagrees that

²⁷⁰ Katz 1978a, p. 50.

experiences are ‘mediated’ through the background mind-set of the experiencer; but can Katz, or for that matter, anyone deny that there are “counter-expectational experiences”?²⁷¹

“Reality” or “objectivity” as a qualitative aspect of experience (a how) needs to be described in terms other than making existential judgements. In order to make possible a distinction between mystical experiences and dream-states, for instance, mystics could explain that the experience contains an aspect of ‘reality’ or ‘objectivity’ in the sense that it is a ‘wakeful’ experience. As an aspect of experience, the ‘reality-feeling’ may, as Katz claims, be too general to exclude most of our every-day experiences. But if the experience contains other phenomenal aspects that suggest to an interpreter that it is more dream-like than wakeful or real, there may be a point to the mystic’s emphasising that the experience had a quality of ‘realness’ without implying any metaphysical reality-claims or making reference to the nature and properties of Ultimate Realities.

Apart from his standard ‘no pure experience’ objection to the notion of ‘non-conceptuality’ in mystical experience, Katz has two primary objections to the inclusion of ‘ineffability’ as a common characteristic of mystical experience. The first, as already mentioned several times, concerns the general nature of the terms:

Though two or more experiences are said to be ‘ineffable’, the term ‘ineffable’ can logically fit many disjunctive and incomparable experiences. That is to say, an atheist can feel a sense of dread at the absurdity of the cosmos which he labels ineffable, while the theist can experience God in a way that he also insists is ineffable. [...] ‘[I]neffable’ *nirvana* is not the ‘ineffable’ Allah of the Sufi, nor the ‘ineffable’ Allah of the Sufi the ‘ineffable’ *Tao* of Taoism. The ontology or reality of the Brahman/Atman that lies ‘beyond all expression’ in the *Mandukya Upanishads* is not the ‘ineffability’ encountered in Eckhart’s Christian experience.²⁷²

Here Katz takes descriptions of personal experiences and mixes these with the ideological and ontological statements of particular religious traditions. As an inevitable consequence of this admixture there could be

²⁷¹ Forman 1990, in the “Introduction”

²⁷² Katz 1978a, p. 48.

no difference between the Sufi's and the orthodox Muslim's experience of Allah, no difference between the Jewish mystic's and the orthodox Jew's experience of Yahweh, and no difference between the Christian mystic's account of God and those that are found in the various Christian traditions. Katz's suggestion that the experience of the Buddhist is *different* from the experience of the Christian does not necessarily imply that he considers the experience of Buddhist A to be *similar* to the experience of Buddhist B. However, there are two basic reasons to assume that he does: 1) The Buddhists are unable to undo their Buddhist interpretive pattern and thus remain pre-experientially conditioned to experience the same mystical phenomenon, *commonly* known as *nirvana*; and, 2) The idea that *no* experiences can be the 'same' or 'similar' is far too broad a notion to function as the basis of Katz's conclusion that the experience of mystic A in tradition X is different from the experience of mystic B in tradition Y.

Katz's second objection to 'ineffability' as a common feature of mystical experience concerns the logical consequences of such a claim:

...to take the mystic's claim seriously, i.e. that his proposition 'x is P' [P=paradoxical, I=ineffable] is a true description, turns out to have the damaging implication that one cannot make any reasonable or even intelligible claim for any mystical proposition. The proposition 'x is P' has the curious logical result that a serious interpretation of the proposition neither makes the experience x intelligible nor informs us in any way about x, but rather cancels x out of our language – which, of course, is what most mystics claim they want. This, however, is no foundation for a phenomenology of mysticism or a typology of comparative mystical experience, for there are a wide variety of mutually exclusive ontological 'states of affairs' which can thus be ruled out.²⁷³

Here it is obvious that Katz has difficulties in distinguishing the experience from its assumed object. At first it seems that Katz is attempting to say that an experience cannot be characterized by the qualities of 'paradoxicality' and 'ineffability' because 'x' (the 'object' of experience) cannot logically be ascribed properties like 'P' and 'I'. This would "cancel x out of our language", that is, the 'object' of the experience cannot be talked about because it becomes logically

²⁷³ Katz 1978a, p. 56.

contradictory. But then Katz indicates that 'x' is not the 'object' of experience, but the *experience* itself ("neither makes the experience x intelligible..."). Interpreted in this way, the 'x' that the mystics want to cancel out of our language is 'experience', and 'P' and 'I' are qualitative aspects of experience, not objects or properties of objects. This interpretation, however, also appears inconclusive as we see Katz introducing "mutually exclusive ontological 'states of affairs'" which directs our attention back to the object-realism that Katz appears to propose. Perhaps 'x' designates the 'object' of experience, and both 'P' and 'I' are properties of the object 'x'. Katz continues his discussion by referring to another mistake that 'writers on mysticism' appear to make: namely, treating terms like 'God', 'nirvana', and so on, as *names* rather than descriptions. In his view, terms like 'Being' and *Urgrund* are not names but descriptions which "carry a meaning relative to some ontological structure".²⁷⁴

In the end, however we chose to interpret them, Katz's arguments appear too ambiguous to provide a foundation for the rejection of the phenomenal characteristics suggested by Stace. Moreover, Katz's analysis of mystical experience is not inclusive of the important qualitative aspects of the experience: 'holyness', 'love', 'unity', 'realness', 'peace' and so forth. And his primary reason for neglecting this feature appears to be his preoccupation with criticising the perennialists. Finally, Katz's approach appears to make the 'object' (the *what*) the prime differentiator of mystical experiences as opposed to the phenomenal characteristics (the *how*), and, as noted before, what difference there is between this object in his theory and the phenomenal characteristics is not very clear.

From what has been said thus far, Katz appears to imply that the experiences of mystics must contain an object (i.e., be intentional); however, this 'object' cannot be interpreted as an 'intentional object' in the way it has been defined in chapter one. Katz could have used the notion of 'intentional object' to make claims about differences and similarities in various experiences, although he has eliminated this possibility by rejecting the validity of the phenomenal characteristics to demarcate experience. What this implies can be explored by looking at

²⁷⁴ Katz 1978a, p. 56.

the alternative ways of viewing the ‘object’ of experience. This will help to ascertain the validity of Katz’s assertion that there are differences rather than similarities among the experiences of mystics.

3.2. A note on Katz’s realism

We will return several times to the issue of Katz’s realism in the coming chapters. In this section, the discussion is limited to an examination of Katz’s claim that there are ‘objects’ in all mystical experiences and that these ‘objects’ are *different* rather than *similar*. We look again at the quotation that initiated our discussion on differences and similarities at the beginning of this chapter:

When Smith says ‘I experience x ’ he is not only involved in the sort of epistemological procedures that we have just discussed, i.e. that the mind is active in constructing x as experienced, but he is also asserting that there is an x to be experienced. In other words, mystics and students of mysticism have to recognize that mystical experience is not (putatively) solely the act of the conditioned experience as constituted from the side of the experiencer, but is also constituted and conditioned by what the *object* or ‘state of affairs’ is that the mystic (believes he) encounters or experiences.²⁷⁵

What is it, then, that “mystics and students of mysticism have to recognize” in consideration of Smith’s experience of x ? Katz seems to draw a distinction between “...the conditioned experience as constituted from the side of the experiencer”²⁷⁶ on the one hand, and “...the *object* or ‘state of affairs’ ... that the mystic (believes he) encounters or experiences”²⁷⁷ on the other. The notion of a conditioned experience as constituted from the side of an experiencer sounds very similar to the notion that “the mind is active in constructing x as experienced”,²⁷⁸

²⁷⁵ Katz 1978a, p. 64.

²⁷⁶ Katz 1978a, p. 64. The use of the term ‘constituted’ can be seen as yet another indication that Katz is phenomenologically inclined. However, the fact that it is the encountered ‘object’ (or ‘state of affairs’) that constitutes the experience (in contrast to the phenomenological thesis that it is the ‘object’ that is constituted in experience) seems to require a metaphysical system of objects. This is very non-phenomenological since it implies a shift of focus from experience to the experience-independent Reality – whether ideal or material.

²⁷⁷ Katz 1978a, p. 64.

²⁷⁸ Katz 1978a, p. 64.

identified in chapter two as Katz's constructivist (or contextualist) thesis. The idea of the mystic's encountering (or believing he has encountered) an 'object', on the other hand, appears to assimilate mystical experience to ordinary acts of perception where it is usually the case that there is an independent 'object' perceived so that the experience is "constituted and conditioned by what the *object* or 'state of affairs' is that the mystic ... experiences". What, then, in Katz's opinion, is the connection between a "conditioned experience as constituted from the side of the experiencer" and "the *object* or 'state of affairs' ... that the mystic (believes he) encounters or experiences"? What does Katz mean to imply by asserting that "what '*x*' is, itself, at least partly determined by a contextual consciousness"?²⁷⁹ Here we seem to be caught up in a form of circular reasoning in which the object that determines the experience is itself determined (at least in part) by a contextual consciousness. Let us go over this one more time: On the one hand, it appears as if Katz is referring to a *real* object, described as the *x* that the mystic claims to have encountered; this is made plain by his denial that the object is merely a result of "the conditioned experience as constituted from the side of the experiencer" as well as his reference to an objective experience in which a mind-independent reality plays a role. On the other hand, this apparently mind-independent *real* reality is also described as if it were a mind-dependent *irreal* reality, "constituted and conditioned by what the *object* or 'state of affairs' is that the mystic (believes he) encounters or experiences".²⁸⁰ At this point, we leave it to our readers to draw their own conclusions about the inherent contradictions of such a formulation.

In terms of being the criterion for the identification and/or demarcation of mystical experiences, it appears that neither the *conditioned experience* nor the *encountered object* will do. If interpreted as a realist claim, the '*object*' encountered by the mystic must be a real object, and the fact that it is also viewed as the object that the mystic *believes* he has encountered can be seen as a confirmation of Katz's warning that "linguistic intentionality

²⁷⁹ Katz 1978a, p. 64.

²⁸⁰ Katz 1978a, p. 64.

does not generate or guarantee the existence of the ‘intentional object’”.²⁸¹

Katz has identified the objects that mystics experience as “special objects”,²⁸² and as examples of these he mentions Allah and Brahman.²⁸³ We now focus on these ‘objects’ of mystical experience in terms of our previous definitions of *real* and *irreal* objects. With these various ‘objects’ in mind we again ask: what is the ‘x itself’ that is (at least partly) “determined by a contextual consciousness”? In terms of the above analysis, since Katz’s thesis of the *encountered object* is complementary to his thesis of the *conditioned experience*, and appears to cover for the realistic element in experience, we are led to believe that the ‘x itself’ – i.e., “the *object* or ‘state of affairs’ that the mystic (believes he) encounters or experiences” – is a *real* object. But, being also partly “determined by a contextual consciousness”, it appears that Katz’s ‘x itself’ does not precisely qualify as a *real* object either, at least not in any reasonable sense of the term. Generally, we do not think that the objects we posit as mind-independent are capable of being qualitatively transformed as a result of our merely attending to them. Perhaps that is what makes Katz’s mystical ‘objects’ so ‘special’: they are transformed (or shaped) by encountering the active experiencer. In that case, Katz would be saying that if the mystic Mary has an experience of God, God’s nature is determined by Mary’s experiencing God, and that would mean that God in Mary’s experience is not *real*, if by ‘real’ we mean that something has an existence independent of our experience of it.

Since we cannot imagine that this is what Katz intends, we instead read him as saying that it is Mary’s representation of God that is (partly)

²⁸¹ Katz 1978a, p. 63. Compare to discussion in section 1.3.3.

²⁸² Katz 1992a, p. 35, n. 12

²⁸³ This was brought up in the context of Katz’s discussion regarding the two ‘positions’ that can be held with respect to the facilitative aspects of experience. One position, according to Katz, holds that mystical experiences are facilitated, and the other (complementary, not contradictory) position is an “alternative position that views mystical experience as an act of God or the transcendent that requires no prior or technical preparation, and that explains the specialness of such experience by reference to the specialness of the *object* of such experience – for example, Allah or Brahman.” [Katz 1992a, p. 35, n. 12] (Compare to note 118, in section 1.3.5.)

determined by Mary's "contextual consciousness".²⁸⁴ However, to bring the realistic element into the equation, the experience must be more or less determined by God, so that "beliefs shape experience just as experience shapes belief",²⁸⁵ or so that reality (whatever that reality may be) can have a determined impact on the mystic's experience and make it what it is.²⁸⁶ But then it must also be possible that Mary experiences an 'x' which she then interprets as God. How much of the experience is determined by God Katz cannot say, and apparently no one can know, since according to Katz there is to be no way of verifying mystical experience claims (this will be further discussed in chapter five). Apparently, even the mystic cannot know, since there is no way for him to distinguish between the experience and his interpretation of the experience. This is because:

...the Hindu mystic does not have an experience of x which he then describes in the, to him, familiar language and symbols of Hinduism, but rather he has a Hindu experience, i.e. his experience is not an unmediated experience of x but is itself the, at least partially, pre-formed anticipated Hindu experience of Brahman. Again, the Christian mystic does not experience some unidentified reality, which he then conveniently labels God, but rather has the at least partially pre-figured Christian experience of God, or Jesus, or the like. Moreover, as one might have anticipated, it is my view based on what evidence there is, that the Hindu experience of Brahman and the Christian experience of God are not the same. We shall support this contention below. The significance of these considerations is that the forms of consciousness which the mystic brings to experience sets structured and limiting parameters on what the experience will be, i.e.

²⁸⁴ This would be a reasonable position if Katz were saying that Mary's *experience* is shaped partly by the object or the reality encountered and partly by Mary's contextual consciousness. But Katz is not talking about the *experience*; he is talking about the *object* of the experience. The objects are, according to Katz, formative of experiences and set the criteria for their identification.

²⁸⁵ Katz 1978a, p. 30.

²⁸⁶ In chapter four we look at Katz's arguments against the view that mystical experience is "merely subjective" as well as his conviction that the experiences are Real. When Katz says that regardless of the reality encountered by the mystic it is mediated by a contextual consciousness, he seems to imply that there are multiple and mutually exclusive realities to encounter. This interpretation is rejected by Gregory, a discussion we resume later in this text.

what will be experienced, and rule out in advance what is 'inexperienceable' in the particular given, concrete, context.²⁸⁷

This attempt to patch things up between realism/cognitivity and contextualism/constructivism is laudable, in that it is inclusive of the self-understanding of mystics. We must note, however, that Katz is not merely saying that the Hindu and the Christian do not have the same experience because the Hindu experiences Brahman and the Christian experiences God. He is also saying that the Christian does not experience 'an unknown x' which he then interprets *as* God, the Christian experiences God. The view that the mystic experiences an 'unknown' x which he then interprets *as* God is one that Katz ascribes to the perennialists – a view that Katz argues *against*. But what would this difference of opinion really amount to in a concrete case of experience?

Take the example of Christian Mary, who has had a mystical experience that is not of an 'x' that she has interpreted in terms of her conditioning (her Christian background and her study of Christian texts); rather she has *experienced* God, or at least she *believes* she has. In any case, the 'object' that Mary believes she has encountered has conditioned Mary's experience into being what it has been – i.e., an experience of God. At any rate, this is what Mary experienced and this is what she reported. According to Katz, this is sufficient evidence to support the notion that the mystical experiences Christian Mary *can* have cannot be similar to

²⁸⁷ Katz 1978a, p. 26. It is not very controversial to say that the notion of Brahman is different from the Christian notion of God, but the *notions* are not what make the experiences different – at least not from a realist point of view. Interestingly, this point of view equally upholds the perennial claim that mystics experience the *same reality* which they then interpret through the *different notions* provided by their religious contexts. If it is Katz's intention to contest with the perennialists on metaphysical grounds, he then involves himself in a theological debate on the nature of ultimate reality. Perennialists do *not* argue on the basis of metaphysics, but rather assert that mystical experiences are similar or different as a result of their *qualitative features* and not their *objects* – i.e., whether they are 'unitive', 'frightening', 'unsettling', 'ecstatic', 'overwhelming', etc. For his part, Katz insists that this is a reductionistic approach since the 'objects' are not taken into account and the qualitative characteristics are 'too general' to outline mystical experiences. In this way, Katz's realist claim and his insistence that the object determines the experience have brought metaphysics into the discourse on sameness and difference in mystical experience. This is why we insist on interpreting the 'objects' in Katz's presentation as *real* objects.

those of Muslim Aisha. This provides both too much and too little information regarding how to interpret mystical experience and mystical experience reports. We attempt to clarify this point below.

To begin with, nothing in the above account informs us as to whether or not Christian Jane's experience of God would be similar to or the same as Christian Mary's. If Katz means to imply that the two Christian experiences would be different, then perhaps he considers no two experiences to be the 'same'. But if no two experiences are the same (which is obviously true if we consider sameness as numerical identity), it seems unnecessary (over-informative and distortive) to point out that the Hindu mystic's experience differs from that of the Muslim mystic, *because* the Hindu and the Muslim experience different 'objects'. If no two experiences are the same, then obviously one Hindu mystic's experience would be different from every other mystic's experience – be it the mystical experience of a Muslim, a Christian, a Jew, or even another *Hindu*. There are different religious traditions throughout the world, and if we take a moment to consider those traditions, we will recognize that Katz's perspective does not inform us as to the difference between the experiences of a Christian who 'sees' God as the cause of all things and experiences spiritual beauty and joy on a daily basis, and the experiences of a Christian mystic who has rare but intense encounters, even feelings of 'unity', with what appears to be the *same* God.

Where will it lead, then, if we regard Katz as considering Christian Mary's and Christian Jane's experiences to be similar in the sense that they 'contain' the 'same' object? The answer is that it leads to another sort of problem: what does it mean to say that the content of Mary's and Jane's experiences is the *same*? How could anyone *know* that Christian Mary and Christian Jane experience the *same* object, although one that is *different* from the object that Muslim Aisha experiences? How could anyone be privy to such information?

If Katz's position is that the mystic encounters a *real* object, he would need special knowledge about reality in order to ascertain whether the experiences of Christian Mary and Christian Jane are similar or different in character. He would have to know, for instance, that there are a variety of entities that more or less correspond to descriptions of

Ultimate Reality found in the different religious traditions; he would also have to know that Allah does not appear as an ‘object’ in the experience of a Buddhist, that the Christian God does not appear as an ‘object’ in the experience of a Muslim and so forth.

We seem to repeatedly come up against the problem of Katz’s realism and how it can be understood in light of his contextual thesis. What does it mean that the object of the mystic’s experience is a *real* object? The statement “Krishna is real” must mean that the concept ‘Krishna’ refers to a certain specific reality (autonomous of experience) and possesses certain characteristic properties that may or may not be translatable to qualitative (experienceable) characteristics. For a sentence like “Krishna is happy” to be true (from a correspondence theory of truth), Krishna must *really* be *happy*, meaning “happy” for *real*, not only ‘seemingly,’ ‘apparently,’ or ‘experienced *as*’ happy.²⁸⁸ But if Krishna is *real* and God is *real* and Allah is *real* – i.e., if they are individual entities with properties independent of human cognition – then why is Christian Mary unable to have an experience of Krishna? Even if she lacks the conceptual frameworks or interpretive patterns to identify Krishna *as* Krishna, she ought to be able to intentionally experience Krishna through her more abstract conceptual framework: as ‘a personality’ (though not *that* person – Krishna, that is), ‘a face’ (though not Krishna’s face), ‘a smile’ (though not Krishna’s smile). Or if the experience was of a ‘guiding presence’, and really that presence was Krishna instead of Jesus (as Mary believes), Mary should be able to experience a ‘guiding presence’ even if she is mistaken about the identity of the one who was present and guiding her.

In our example, Mary has two possible ways of proceeding from this experience. She can either claim to have seen a happy face or claim to have had a vision of Jesus and that in her vision Jesus was happy. Since Katz recognizes the distinction between different levels of interpretation – what we have referred to as first-hand and second-hand reports –

²⁸⁸ There are good reasons to bring in some reservations before interpreting Katz as having a correspondence theory of truth. In “Mystical speech, mystical meaning” he asserts that “...language is multiform ... it is more than a series of nouns, more than a series of ostensive definitions, more than a correspondence theory of truth (à la Carl Hempel’s ‘snow is white’).” Katz 1992a p. 8. It is difficult to know exactly what Katz means when he claims that language is “more than a correspondence theory of truth”.

Mary's first-hand interpretation (either during or after her experience) may be that Krishna is Jesus. Conditioned as she is, and especially if she is conditioned to the extent that Katz claims, it is very likely that she did experience Jesus. Yet if she is less conditioned or cannot fit her experience into her Christian categories of conceptualization, what would Katz say 'happened'? How do we best characterize Mary's experience?

Perhaps this is an unfair question. Gregory, for example, argues that Katz's theory does not at all imply that there must be an "entire pantheon of metaphysical entities" affirmed by Katz:

One of the most intriguing if not perplexing characteristics of Katz's contextualist thesis is his claim that the mystics of different religious traditions each experience the respective ontological referents of their particular faith traditions. The Buddhist experiences nirvana, the Jewish devekuth, the Christian Jesus, and so on. When not understood accurately, his claim creates an interesting impression: it seems to some that he affirms the existence of an entire pantheon of metaphysical entities, each of which may be seen to inhabit its own distinct realm of ultimate truth – a larger conception of ultimate truth as something of a carnival of transcendent plurality. This, however, is not what Katz claims. His insistence that the Buddhist mystic experiences nirvana and the Hindu mystic Brahman, etc. is not, as we have seen, an insistence about the nature of the *real object* lying behind the mystics experiences, or the nature of what ultimate reality is. Rather, it is merely an affirmation about the nature of the *phenomenological object* a mystic *experiences*. His talk of 'Jesus,' 'nirvana,' 'devekuth,' etc. is talk of judged interpreted sensations that may or may not be accurately judged.²⁸⁹

In this quotation one can see that Gregory also interprets Katz's 'objects' as "phenomenological object", in which case it all seems to make sense. In relation to the discussion at hand, however, it is important to focus on Gregory's warning not to interpret the 'objects' that Katz believes mystics to experience as "real objects". From Gregory's explanation it seems that in some way or another there is a 'given', or at least a distinction between experience and interpretation, and that Katz only means to suggest that this may be incorrectly interpreted. This interpretation also happens to match the idea that the mystic experiences

²⁸⁹ Gregory 2006, p. 271.

an ‘x’ (a ‘judged interpreted sensation’) which she may judge (or interpret) inaccurately – the model of experience which has been rejected by Katz. In this interpretation, it would according to Katz be reasonable to interpret the events involving Mary and Krishna as follows; “Jesus” is the ‘judged interpreted sensation’ that Mary may have judged inaccurately. So where are the realism and the experienced object? An interpreted sensation could be of anything – i.e., any natural or supernatural entity that may interact with an experiencing self – and if there are no rules for how to interpret these sensations (givens), anything could be interpreted or judged as anything.

If we stay with the ‘objects’ a little longer and look at Katz’s description of his own experience of the transcendent, we find support for our initial supposition that Krishna, Jesus, Allah, Brahman, etc., are, in Katz’s view, ‘entities’ (even personalities):

In the performance of t’fillah, not all the time because that would be the ideal, but occasionally, one feels that one is in the presence – a transcendental presence – of one’s maker, of one’s keeper. There is a profound feeling of reciprocity, a sense of intimacy that comes in the performance of certain mitzvot, sometimes on Shabbat, sometimes Tom Kippur [sic!], but especially in t’fillah, on different occasions. It means something. ... It’s interactive, and the person with whom one is interacting is, *kinyachol* [as it were], the divine person. The ultimate presence is interested and engaged. It’s not just listening like some psychoanalyst who just listens but has, in effect, no personal involvement. It’s someone who is deeply, genuinely interested and reciprocates that interest.²⁹⁰

Interpreted according to the contextual model, Katz’s experience would be merely the result of the expectations and conditioning of a man who reads the Torah. As we shall see, this is not what Katz means, since it would certainly take the edge off his experience. The ‘transcendental presence’ must be real, have an existence independent of the religious conditions that it is interpreted through. This leaves us with a question: if Katz’s experience of the transcendent is *not* the experience of an ‘x’ that is then interpreted according to Jewish patterns of pre-conditioning,

²⁹⁰ Katz in interview with Haberman 1994, quoted from Gregory 2006, p. 208. (“Tom” Kippur is very likely a misprint and I have no way of telling how far back it goes.)

what is the best way of understanding what it is? Katz claims the experience should be interpreted as a “distinctive ontological condition”:

Whether it has an objective ontological corollary, or if it's only a psychological condition, that is the open question. But even if it has, in large part a psychological aspect, I would argue for analyzing it as a distinctive ontological condition that is not reducible to a mere psychological state.²⁹¹

What Katz seems to be saying is that neither he nor anyone else can tell whether (a) there *exists* a metaphysical entity that has interacted with his experiential ‘reality’ or (b) whether the properties he ascribes to this existentially set entity are correctly or incorrectly apprehended? But if it has not been an anonymous reality (an ‘x’) that Katz has experienced and then interpreted as he has been conditioned to, he must have had a “pre-formed anticipated” Jewish experience of Yahweh. If Yahweh in this account is possibly real (because, as Katz emphasises, no one can tell), and no one but the Jews can experience Yahweh (and Katz cannot be experiencing God since he is not a Christian), then it also must be possible that God, Allah, Krishna, Nirvana, Brahman, etc. are just as real (i.e., real in the same sense) for their respective mystical adherents. In that case, whatever Gregory’s analysis shows, Katz must be understood as opening the possibility for “an entire pantheon of metaphysical entities, each of which may be seen to inhabit its own distinct realm of ultimate truth”, since that is how he would analyse his own experience.

From a phenomenological perspective there is no need for a metaphysical system in order to interpret the experiences of mystics. Katz’s focus on the ‘objects’ of the experience and his insistence that it is the ‘objects’ (not the phenomenal characteristics) that demarcate mystical experience seem to require a metaphysical system of ‘objects’ for the interpretation of mystics. It is not even very clear where interpretation fits into the picture, since Katz rejects the perennial distinction between experience and interpretation. So the question remains: how does Katz know that the experiences of mystics are different in different mystical traditions and not similar across religious borders?

²⁹¹ Katz in interview with Haberman 1994, quoted from Gregory 2006, p. 208.

If Katz knows this by knowing that the reports of the mystics are in a one-to-one relation to the experience of the mystic and also to the religious tradition that the mystic belongs to, then Katz must think that there is no interpretation of experience required from either the mystic or the second-hand interpreter (i.e., Katz, the perennialists, etc.). The interpretation of the experience is already 'given' to the experiencer. If this interpretation of Katz's position is reasonable, then it would also be reasonable to think that the Reality encountered by the mystic is 'given' and then described accurately to a second-hand interpreter who receives the 'given' in a textual form that does not require interpretation. Obviously, this is very far from what Katz aims to say since he explicitly denies the possibility of unmediated experience, *and* since he constructs a theory of interpretation of mystical reports. But how then does interpretation fit in? And how does the conditioning that the mystic brings to his experience come into play in relation to the 'real' object of experience? As we have seen, Katz denies the possibility of distinguishing between experience and interpretation. This means that it is not an 'unknown x' that is experienced and then interpreted by the experiencer; it is rather that the experiencer has the pre-conditioned, pre-shaped, and pre-conceptualised experience of 'whatever object he thinks he encounters'.

According to Katz, there is no reason to equate two experiences of union if one of them is reported by a Christian mystic and the other by a Sufi. In his view, since perennialists believe that one can distinguish between an experience and its interpretation (which is merely another way of saying that mystics experience an 'x' that they then interpret *as* something),²⁹² they mistakenly conclude that they are able to examine a mystical experience report and separate that which the mystic *experienced* from that which is the product of her *interpretational background*. This is why Katz believes the perennial account to be reductive.

²⁹² Or even more simple; they claim that experience is ambiguous, and that rather than making an existential claim when describing an experience one has to view it as an interpretational claim. If a certain 'object' can be experienced in various ways and be ascribed various meanings, this must mean that a main point which needs to be investigated further is the precise mechanisms of interpretation. Not the nature of the 'given' or the like.

From Katz's point of view perennialists believe that when a Christian and a Muslim both report having had a unitive experience, this is an indication that they have had similar experiences, and the fact that the Christian mentions God as an objective relational point to his experience, while the Muslim mentions Allah, is an effect of the contextual and linguistic circumstances that surround the mystics respectively. Katz reads this as the perennialists affirming that mystic's 'misrepresent' their experiences: the Christian who has encountered Ultimate Reality calls it 'God' in accordance with his conditioned background, while the Muslim, in accordance with his conditioned background, calls that *same* Ultimate Reality 'Allah'. Thus Katz concludes that the perennialists think that mystics *mis*describe their experiences:

To think that the 'unitive' mystic merely describes his experience in this way is to distort the situation which gave rise to the experience, the experience itself, and the report of the experience. Thus, for example, seriously to credit that Augustine did not have the unitive experience described in his *Confessions* (Bk. 9) but only used this language is unwarranted for two strong reasons at least; (1) surely an Augustine would not consciously *mis*describe his experience; (2) the theory of misdescription due to orthodox pressures is untenable in Augustine's case because, in fact, the unitive account he gives is more in conflict, though little did he seem to know it, with Christian orthodoxy than a relational description would have been.²⁹³

As interesting as Katz's views on Augustine might be, it is unlikely that perennial interpreters would subscribe to the idea that Augustine had *mis*described his experience, especially since his experience of 'unity' provides another important bit of confirming evidence for one of the central characteristics in their general typology of mystical experience.²⁹⁴ Katz's argument is that because perennialists draw metaphysical conclusions regarding the *object* that the mystic experiences, they are led to equate the ontological reality of Allah with the ontological reality of God. But it is Katz, and not the perennialists, who believes that mystical experiences necessarily contain 'objects', and that a "distinctive ontological condition" is at hand during a mystical experience. While some perennialists are also metaphysicians, it is unfair to say that *all*

²⁹³ Katz 1978a, p. 42.

²⁹⁴ See for instance Hood (2001), Pike (1992), Huxley (1945), etc.

perennialists equate the phenomenal similarities in experience with the similarities or sameness of distinctive ontological conditions. The fact that Katz stands against the idea of the unity of “ontological conditions” appears to indicate that he considers those conditions to be distinct – “... an entire pantheon of metaphysical entities, each of which may be seen to inhabit its own distinct realm of ultimate truth”. Katz’s realist leaning would imply that it is these specific ‘ontological conditions’ that contact the experiencer; theoretically, then, it would be possible for Mary to have an experience of the angel Metatron. But Katz’s contextualist argument would deny this possibility.

The “conditioning pattern” of the mystic affects the experience to the extent that the mystic cannot experience anything that is not conceptually covered by these patterns – i.e., anything *new*. The Jewish mystic, for instance, “rarely, if ever” has an experience of ‘unity’, at least according to Katz:

...the Jewish conditioning pattern so strongly impresses the tradition’s mystics (as all Jews) with the fact that one does *not* have mystical experiences of God in which one loses one’s identity in ecstatic moments of unity, that the Jewish mystic rarely, if ever, has such experiences. What the Jewish mystic experiences is, perhaps, the Divine Throne, or the angel Metatron, or aspects of the *Sefirot*, or the heavenly court and palaces, or the Hidden Torah, or God’s secret Names, but not loss of self in unity with God.²⁹⁵

The realist side results in the conclusion that it should be theoretically possible for Mary to experience Metatron, or, for that matter, Krishna; this, however, is not supported by the contextualist side which results in the conclusion that the ‘conditioning pattern’ so strongly impresses the mystic that he has an experience of what he is taught to experience – quite apart, it would seem, from whatever “ontological conditions” might be present.

One way of solving this problem would be to view the ‘specific ontological conditions’ as an ‘x’ that is then interpreted in accordance with the interpretive pattern of the experiencer. However, as we have seen, Katz rejects this possibility as well. Moreover, Katz provides no

²⁹⁵ Katz 1978a, p 34

information as to what it is that Mary experiences should she experience Metatron. The fact that she may not report an experience of Metatron, for example, may have nothing to do with the distinct ontological conditions she has encountered.

Nonetheless, Katz positions the 'object' of experience at the centre in the process of differentiating between experiences that are *different*, and rejects the assumption that they can be similar if they have certain common phenomenal qualities. But if it is so very unclear what this 'object' is and how it is supposed to help us differentiate between different experiences, would it not be of some help to grant the phenomenal qualities of experience a role in this project of differentiation, and this without necessarily implying that all mystical experiences are characterized by the quality of 'unity' are the *same* experiences?

3.3. Conclusions and summary

Katz repeatedly refers us to the 'object' of the experience as a demarcational criterion for mystical experience. However, it is difficult to pin this 'object' down when it comes to type, since in Katz's various explanations it appears to vacillate between the *real* and the *irreal*. The problem of the interchangeable object in Katz's perspective indicates that his theory suffers from *theoretical inconsistency*. By speaking of the 'objects' in the mystic's experience at times as if they are 'real' and at other times as if they are 'irreal', it becomes possible to draw any number of conclusions about the phenomenon of mystical experience. Moreover, although Katz claims to include phenomenal characteristics in his account of mystical experience, he makes a considerable effort to show that the phenomenal characteristics outlined by the perennialists are inadequate as demarcational criteria for mystical experience. After this, however, he does not bother to replace the phenomenal characteristics he has rejected with new ones, and by this omission leaves us without any precise *demarcation standards* for mystical experience.

One way that Katz could combine his contextualism with his realism and give stability to the 'objects' involved in mystical experiences would be to assign those objects intentional properties. Indeed there are several

passages in Katz's writings which indicate that he meant to say 'intentional objects' when talking about the 'objects' of mystical experience. On the other hand, several objections could be raised against this point of view: 1) Katz's rejection of the phenomenological method as well as the results derived therefrom; and, 2) his rejection of the phenomenal characteristics of experience, which he considers too general to outline what mystical experience is. Without some delineation of phenomenal characteristics, however, it is impossible to make claims of similarity and difference concerning experience. If this is so, it is difficult to see how Katz is *advancing the understanding of the field* by pleading for the recognition of differences.

Chapter 4

The genesis of mystical experience

Introduction to chapter four

Vor dem Betreten des Allerheiligsten musst Du die Schuhe ausziehen, aber nicht nur die Schuhe, sondern alles, Reisekleid und Gepäck, und darunter die Nacktheit, und alles, was unter der Nacktheit ist, und alles, was sich unter diesem verbirgt, und dann den Kern und den Kern des Kerns, dann das Übrige und dann den Rest und dann noch den Schein des unvergänglichen Feuers. Erst das Feuer selbst wird vom Allerheiligsten aufgesogen und lässt sich von ihm aufsaugen, keines von beiden kann dem widerstehen.²⁹⁶

Franz Kafka

Altered states of consciousness²⁹⁷ (ASC) are generally accepted as a characterization of mystical experience, and even though not all altered states are ‘mystical’, all mystical experiences seem to involve a ‘different’ mode of experiencing. The truism that all peoples have in common certain characteristics that transcend their contextual borders is the basis for all philosophical investigation, whether phenomenological, naturalistic or hermeneutical. It is also an assumption that forms the

²⁹⁶ “Before entering the Ultimate Holyness you must remove your shoes, and not only your shoes but everything: your travel clothes and luggage, and beneath these your nakedness, and everything underneath that nakedness, and everything beneath that, and then the core, and then the core of the cores, and then the rest and what is left and then also the Light from the inextinguishable Fire. Only the Fire can be absorbed by the Ultimate Holyness and allows itself to be absorbed, none of the two can resist this.” (My translation.)

²⁹⁷ See Charles Tart’s (ed.) *Altered states of consciousness*, 1969.

basis of epistemology, ethics and semantics; without it none of these disciplines would make sense. Epistemological considerations of any kind must assume that certain general structures are involved in man's cognitive functioning, and it is these the epistemologist aims to classify and clarify in terms of function and content. To initiate a classification of those structures that are relevant to cognitive functioning, William James proposed that

Normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one type of special consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different.²⁹⁸

What James means by "normal waking consciousness" can be translated into any conceptual framework, interpretational pattern or language, since it is a common feature of all mankind to differentiate between states of sleep and states of wakefulness, and these are also ascribed a difference in cognitive status.

In different contexts the cognitive status of dreams and the cognitive status of wakeful states have been given different values. In this connection, however, it must be mentioned that in the modern Western paradigm the "rational" state is regarded as the 'highest' and most 'cognitively' rewarding state of consciousness, and that to which scientific judgements are entrusted.

The possibility of a rich spectrum of 'types' having different cognitive statuses so enchanted James that he set about experimenting with nitrous oxide. Nitrous oxide introduced James to one state that might be classified as 'wakeful' yet cognitively altered. James considered these *altered states* to be informative with respect to epistemological issues surrounding 'normal' experience. That is, he thought that these 'other' states, whether we choose to call them 'intoxications', 'psychosis', 'hallucinations' or 'delusions', could be cognitively valuable and informative regarding our foremost 'instrument' of knowledge: consciousness.

²⁹⁸ James 1902, p. 298, quoted from Batson/Schoenrade/Ventis 1993, p. 119.

While nitrous oxide and other mind-altering substances may be viewed as short-cuts to the achievement of altered states, various other consciousness-altering methods are described in the mystical literature of the world. In most shamanistic cultures and among many mystics, states of consciousness that are generally viewed by modern psychiatrists as illusory or deceptive are considered to be cognitively higher than so-called normal states. According to the interpretive pattern of most modern psychiatrists, the 'normal' wakeful state is generally seen as the 'highest' or most 'rational' cognitive state; this point, however, invariably carries the implication that any unusual or non-ordinary or otherwise altered 'state' is cognitively untrustworthy by comparison.

The lists of phenomenal characteristics discussed in chapter three refer to states in which the qualitative features of experience match the labels on the list. Exactly how these 'states' that have been identified as mystical are related to specific models of facilitation is unclear, although there is extensive empirical research spread over a number of disciplines aiming to find out. The various disciplines (ranging from the cognitive sciences, psychology and neurobiology to the interpretative and philosophical sciences) evince an interest in finding correlations between 'states' (phenomenological or psychological interpretations of experience) and empirically observable (measurable, predictable and controllable) phenomena.²⁹⁹ These correlations can be found between states achieved through different methods of facilitation (such as comparisons between ayahuasca-induced states, meditative states and states achieved through electromagnetic stimulation), and between the observable differences that may occur when the *same* method of

²⁹⁹ See for instance Michael Persinger's controversial study *Neuropsychological bases of God beliefs* (1987). Persinger's study is mainly focused on electromagnetic stimulation of central areas of the brain to elicit a 'sense of presence'. For an interdisciplinary study, see also "Psychobiology of altered states of consciousness", Dieter Vaitl et. al. in *Psychological Bulletin* 2005, vol 131, No. 1, 98-127. The authors review current research results concerning alternative states of consciousness. For a philosophical and cognitive sciences perspective on the issue, the anthology *Neural correlates of consciousness*, Metzinger T. (ed.), MIT Press, 2000, provides a good description of the central issues in these disciplines as well as the problematic nature of clarifying how subjective experience is correlated with neurobiological events.

facilitation has been practiced.³⁰⁰ The correlational projects aim at extending the understanding of the field of experience in general and mystical experience in particular.

The importance of correlative research findings lies in their potential contribution to the establishment of an 'objective' science concerning these relatively unknown phenomena. This is important to mysticism and the interpretation of mystical literature because the cognitive value assigned to states that can be phenomenally described as mystical varies according to different interpretive models. Thus the methodology and conceptual appropriateness of these interpretive models are of important concern, especially since agreement on this matter is difficult to find, even within the same research area. In Western psychiatry and psychology, for example, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV) is the standard against which most practitioners and theorists of psychology judge these altered states to be 'delusional' and cognitively equal to hallucinations. This particular interpretive model commonly views mystical experience as a psychological disorder as well, reducing the possibility that such experiences will receive serious attention and open-minded evaluation. On the other hand, several psycho-sociological accounts present a more positive account of mystical experience that sees creativity and the enhancement of certain cognitive structures as its outcome, contradicting the view that mystical experience is cognitively meaningless and perhaps even harmful to the psyche.³⁰¹

The various views on mystical experience and altered states of consciousness both within and between these numerous scientific and academic disciplines are also aspects of Katz's 'context' – aspects that may have subtle political, social, medical, pedagogical and may even have

³⁰⁰ See, for instance, Echenhofer 2004.

³⁰¹ Batson/Schoenrade/Ventis 1993, for instance, analyse mystical experience in terms of the reality-transformative processes occurring during creative episodes. We could contrast this with various Freudian perspectives (among others) in which religious experience (religiousness in general) is seen as psychopathological – i.e., disconnected from reality (Batson/Schoenrade/Ventis 1993, p. 232). William Farthing (1992) presents a different view, claiming that the changes in higher level thought processes are merely *experienced* as creatively enhanced when in fact "...often their solutions are no better, and perhaps worse, than normal, but in the ASC they have a delusion that they are more creative than usual." (Farthing 1992, p. 209)

an effect on our everyday conception of the world; thus they represent a further potential means of understanding the wellsprings of Katz's thought. Indeed he is known to have discussed many of these issues publicly and has explicitly rejected some of the views mentioned above – an issue to which we shall return in the chapters to come. These considerations are of primary concern when it comes to assessing the potential of Katz's theory to *extend the understanding of the field*. Judgements concerning this must be based partly on Katz's position and partly on the nature of the current understanding of the field.

Although the question of Katz's position relative to the cognitive outcome of mystical experience will not be broached until chapter five, it is here appropriate to enquire as to his view concerning the connection between the facilitative aspects of mystical experience and the cognitive status of altered states that are interpreted as mystical experiences. Are there altered states of consciousness with cognitive aspects that equal or transcend the 'normal' cognitive state of wakeful consciousness? If the 'normal' state is viewed as the highest cognitive form of consciousness – the state in which reality is represented with greatest accuracy – it would appear that the cognitivity of any alternative state of consciousness could only be valued as 'lower' than this.

The one experience that Katz seems to acknowledge as being genuinely mystical is that which results from an "act of God or the transcendent"³⁰² with "no prior or technical preparation".³⁰³ This understanding of mystical experience, however, runs into difficulties as soon as 'states' such as 'illumination' or *nirvana* are involved and God or the transcendent may not have been involved at all. If Katz insists that the experiences of mystics are necessarily 'externally oriented', or directed towards an 'object' in a transcendent reality, this implies that Katz devalues the validity of the self-understanding of Buddhists and other similar practitioners. This view also entails the need for a metaphysical system according to which the boundary between 'transcendent' and 'immanent' reality is explicitly defined; and there is a wide variety of understandings among metaphysical systems regarding

³⁰² Katz 1992a, p. 35, n. 12

³⁰³ Katz 1992a, p. 35, n. 12

where this boundary is to be drawn. The question of interest is: when Katz claims that mystical experiences are always directed towards a transcendent reality, which metaphysical system is he taking into account – his own or that of the mystic he is interpreting?

Katz believes that his view of mystical experience as an “act of God or the transcendent that requires no prior or technical preparation”³⁰⁴ complements the view that mystical experience is, or can be, facilitated. A question that emerges here is whether or not an experience that is caused by an act of the transcendent *excludes* the possibility that this experience is either phenomenally or cognitively *different* from ‘normal’ states of consciousness. And if ‘the transcendent’ causally interacts with the mystical experiencer thus opening fresh possibilities of experience that are not encountered in ‘normal’ states, how is this different from the various facilitative methods practiced in different religious and mystical traditions? What is the difference between an altered state caused by God and an altered state caused by, for example, neurochemical stimulation? And are the above mentioned causal factors mutually exclusive?

The ‘cognitive’ aspects of the ‘states’ that James studied and considered informative with respect to consciousness and cognitivity have been treated with a great deal of suspicion by many modern investigators, especially in cases where those ‘states’ have been facilitated by the ingestion of mind-altering substances that are commonly viewed as being distortive of reality. Even such conditions as disease and sensory deprivation have been known to cause hallucinations. This, of course, has resulted in the invalidation of the cognitive elements in these experiences as well. This matter is of importance because Katz’s position exhibits certain indications that this is how he views mystical experiences that are facilitated: non-cognitive and without relevance to religious phenomena or traditions. The remainder of this chapter consists of an examination of this possibility as well as its consequences for Katz’s theory in terms of our evaluative criteria.

³⁰⁴ Katz 1992a, p. 35, n. 12

When it comes to the idea of altered states of consciousness, Katz does not explicitly deny their possibility, although he limits the methods of facilitation to language and its ‘transformative character’:

In that the mechanisms of knowing *necessarily* impinge on, even create, the substantive knowledge gained in mystical experience no less than in the more mundane epistemological contexts, language is a, if not the, key issue in reforming those structures required for obtaining mystical awareness. Language creates, when used by the mystical adept – the guru in the training of his disciple, or the *mekubbal* or Sufi in their meditative practices – the operative process through which the essential epistemic channels that permit mystical forms of knowing and being are made accessible.³⁰⁵

Language thus functions to create the process that permits “mystical forms of knowing”, but it is important to note that it does not do this in a way that is different from the way it functions in “more mundane epistemological contexts”. The problem with this account – and the reason there is a conflict between Katz and the perennialists – is that according to the perennialists (and some mystics) it is precisely in the area of language (concepts) that one finds the difference between mystical and ordinary states. Language, along with its possible transformative character, is *undone*, the conditioning pattern of everyday experience is reduced or extinguished, and the *mystical* forms of knowing differ from the ordinary by being (at least to a large extent) non-conceptual. It should be pointed out, however, that this seems to reflect the attitude, shared with Katz, that all concepts are tied to language, which is not necessarily the case.

As far as we can understand from Katz’s writings, the language that transforms the mystical consciousness is *religious* language; and although we do not know precisely what this is in Katz’s theory, it seems to consist in certain terms or modes of expression found in religious literature and typical of the specific religious tradition in question. Thus it appears that for Katz, religious language forms the mystic’s consciousness on what the mystic can experience, and without this language there can be no religious experience.

³⁰⁵ Katz 1992a, p. 8.

4.1. The facilitation of mystical experience

We have briefly mentioned psychiatry's interest in non-regular modes of experiencing and how some psychiatric frameworks interpret these experiences as instances of psychopathology. The association of mysticism with psychological deficiency and non-cognitive or delusional states is neither new nor uncommon, and it mainly rests on a naturalistic interpretive pattern in which an external Reality plays a causal role in our experiences. According to DSM-III, a 'delusion' is:

...a false personal belief based on incorrect inference about external reality and firmly sustained in spite of what everyone else believes and in spite of what constitutes incontrovertible and obvious evidence to the contrary.³⁰⁶

And a hallucination is:

...a sensory stimulus without external stimulation of the relevant sensory organ³⁰⁷

These definitions presuppose an ontology that clearly states the nature of 'external reality', what causal relations there are between this 'external reality' and the experienced reality, what constitutes a piece of 'evidence', and the epistemological criteria for determining what constitutes a 'correct' or 'incorrect inference'. If this ontology, for instance, denies the existence of certain elements of reality (such as God), the experience of an encounter with such elements can only be interpreted as an illusion, hallucination or other type of experience with low cognitive status. Take, for example, the case in which the epistemological criteria for correct and incorrect inferences is that 'experience' concerning the nature of 'external reality' cannot be trusted, and that emphasis should thus lay on commonsensical accounts of 'external reality' instead – e.g., that it is necessarily material and basically what 'most people' think it is. In such a circumstance, experiential claims concerning an immaterial reality or

³⁰⁶ Lukoff 1985, p. 356. Lukoff quotes DSM-III. Lukoff's aim is to find criteria according to which psychotic (or psychotomimetic) experiences can be given a positive interpretation.

³⁰⁷ Lukoff 1985, p. 356. Lukoff quotes DSM-III.

those that contradict the prevailing view would be interpreted as ‘delusional’ or ‘hallucinatory’.

Researchers influenced by the perennial school often emphasise the epistemological advantages that may be hidden in altered states of consciousness, and also that there may be scientific interest in the psychological and emotional advantages that some of these states may lead to. The problem is, as always, that of differentiation. It would seem that Katz’s offer of assistance to mystics and interpreters of mysticism would be achieved if he were able to provide a method for differentiating between cognitive and non-cognitive experiences. To ask this of any epistemological approach, however, would also be asking it to form some set of ontological presuppositions, since, in naturalistic approaches, ‘knowledge’ requires a correlation between experience and objective reality. Since Katz claims cognitivism for mystical experiences, he ought to make explicit the underlying premises that he uses to determine which experiences are non-delusional (in the sense that they inform the mystic about ‘external’ reality) and those that are delusional. We shall return to Katz’s views on cognitivism in mystical experience in chapter five. Having thus noted the relation between issues of cognitivism and the facilitative aspects of mystical experience as well as their importance for the enhancement of our understanding of mystical experience and mystical claims, we now focus on Katz’s understanding of the facilitative aspects of mystical experience and altered states of consciousness.

It is widely accepted in philosophical contexts that when certain of an individual’s biochemical structures and neural areas are stimulated, this infallibly results in certain corresponding phenomenal and physiological alterations that constitute alternative states of consciousness. The matter of which physiological alteration produces a specific type of physiological change is a question for neural science. On the other hand, answers to questions concerning which neural alteration produces a specific *phenomenal* change in the individual requires a report of phenomenal changes for comparison.³⁰⁸ Alterations in perception,

³⁰⁸ In Vaitl et al. 2005, the authors review the research on ASC by classifying experiences in terms of ‘causes’. The experience-types can be caused by (a) physical and

memory, cognitive functioning, emotional involvement, motivation of activity, etc., are all possible candidates for having caused an altered state of consciousness.³⁰⁹ Tests built on empirically measurable changes (e.g., observations of changes in behaviour, intelligence tests that measure changes in cognitive functioning, and so on) are constructed to correlate these empirically measurable features of different states to phenomenally experienced changes. This correlation requires a phenomenological classification of ‘experienced states’ – the phenomenological classification that Katz has rejected as insufficient on account of its generality.

Whatever status one may ascribe to the results of these correlative approaches, they require reports of phenomenally experienced changes. But it is not only the phenomenal (reported) characteristics that Katz views as fallible in terms of discerning the common characteristics of experience; the neurological aspect of the correlated pair is also rejected because it is seen as being incapable of outlining similar (or same) experience:

Mysticism is not a matter of brainwaves. Mysticism makes an ontological claim to some experience with ultimate reality. So that to reduce it to brainwaves is not to deal with it. [...] The fact is that the brainwave is not the same thing or equal to ecstasy or love or encounter or loss of self or whatever. It may be that these different states have the same oscillation

physiological stimulation, (b) psychological methods of induction, (c) disease, (d) pharmacological induction, and (e) spontaneously induced (includes experiences like sleep, dreaming, hypnagogic states, daydreaming, etc.). These methods of induction are then correlated with elements listed in one of the four phenomenological dimensions of ASC, namely changes in: activation, awareness span, self awareness and sensory dynamics.

³⁰⁹ Arnold M Ludwig lists: Alterations in thinking, Disturbed time-sense, Loss of control, Change in emotional expression, Body image change, Perceptual distortions, Change in meaning or significance, Sense of the ineffable, Feelings of rejuvenation, and Hypersuggestibility. (In Tart 1969, pp. 13-16) William Farthing lists the following cognition-related characteristic changes during ASC: Changes in attention, Changes in perception, Changes in imagery and fantasy, Changes in inner speech, Changes in memory, Changes in higher-level thought processes, Changes in the meaning or significance of experiences, Changed time-experience, Changes in emotional feeling and expression, Changes in level of arousal, Changes in self-control, Changes in suggestibility, Changed body image, and Changed sense of personal identity. (Farthing 1992, pp. 208-212)

on your brainwave meter, but they're not the same thing. The fact is, we can have different emotions produced by different circumstances. So, for instance, we can cry out of joy and we can cry out of pain, and to think that merely the fact that we might register on a machine that we're undergoing crying is sufficient to explain this phenomenon seems to me to be extremely reductionistic and a position to be avoided.³¹⁰

Here Katz appears to reject not only the equation of 'brainwaves' with phenomenally experienced reality (criticizing the reductive character of such equations), but also those correlations that can be made between 'states' of the central nervous system and 'states' of consciousness. The above quotation also appears to indicate that Katz has in some way misunderstood the reasons why researchers register brainwaves to begin with. The main purpose of registering or mapping neurological activity is not to explain a phenomenon like crying (which generally does not need a 'machine' to 'register' it). It is to register measurable empirical concomitants of alternative states of cognitive functioning (if there are any) and, of course, to enhance prediction and control. Although it is perfectly legitimate to criticize conclusions drawn in the rash manner described by Katz, this is not the attitude one finds in most of the correlative approaches. Rather, there seems to be widespread sensitivity to the complexity of neural systems, phenomenal experience, and the levels of meaning in reports of subjective experience.

It also remains unclear whether Katz's statement that "mysticism is not a matter of brainwaves" is meant to suggest that the mystic need not have an altered 'state' in order to have a mystical experience – i.e., that a mystical experience does not imply an altered state of consciousness. The fact that mystical claims refer to experiences with ultimate reality does not necessarily imply that the experiences do not involve an altered state. Whether the states involved are similar or not is another question. The brain can be in a condition that severely impairs or improves cognitive processes, those same processes that Katz refers to as formative of the mystical experience. Whether or not Katz also considers the experiences to be phenomenally different (or similar) as a consequence of differences (or similarities) in their neural basis, cannot be determined from what has been said above. However, we do have

³¹⁰ Katz 2000, response to Gregory, in Gregory 2006, p. 33

indications that Katz considers the mystic's report to mirror the phenomenally experienced reality with no necessary connection to neurobiological processes.

The idea that similar means of altering cognitive patterns of interpretation lead to similar types of experience may not be what Katz intends to contradict here. Some distinctions, however, may facilitate our analysis of Katz's position. Concerning the correlative methods, we need to distinguish between the various 'phases' of an experience that are correlated in the chain: *facilitation – neurobiological changes – phenomenal experience – report of experience*.

As a first step, we need to determine the link between *methods of facilitation* and *physical/neurobiological* changes. This includes the question of whether different activities (methods of facilitation like fasting, rhythmic dancing, pharmaceutical ingestion, etc.) can cause the same neurobiological condition, or, alternatively, whether the same activity can cause different neurobiological conditions. The second step concerns the relation between the *neurobiological* state and the characteristics of *phenomenal* experience. This includes the question of whether the same neurological condition will always cause phenomenal experiences of the same type. A third step on the correlational ladder concerns the relationship between *phenomenal* experience and the *report* of this experience. The central question concerning this pair is whether phenomenal experience stands in a one-to-one correlation with reported experience.

These distinctions are not made by Katz, which is one reason that his position on the matter is difficult to determine. Many perennial interpreters that Katz addresses seem to neglect these different stages of correlation as well. As a result they draw certain conclusions about the report, and even the experience, based upon the type of method used; or they conclude, like Stace, that similar descriptions imply similar experiences:

...if the phenomenological descriptions of the two experiences [i. e. drug-induced and not drug-induced] are indistinguishable, so far as can be

ascertained, then it cannot be denied that if one is a genuine mystical experience the other is also.³¹¹

Here Stace appears to claim that knowing the ‘method’ or ‘cause’ that induces a particular experience does not help in terms of enabling us to draw conclusions about the type experience it is. On the other hand, he considers similar *reports* to indicate similar experiences, which implies that he believes there is a one-to-one correlation between an experience and its report.

Stace not only set the standard for identification of ‘similar’ experiences, he also provided a list of characteristics to help identify the phenomenally experienced reality of mystics, as well as the criteria used by contemporary empirical investigators to identify similar experiences by stimulation of relevant areas of the brain.³¹² Concerning the relationship between an experience and its report, Stace thought that experience could be to some degree distinguished from interpretation, implying, it would seem, that the process by which the experiencer translates her experience into a meaningful report can be analysed, investigated and conceptually clarified. For Katz, on the other hand, the distinction between experience and interpretation is more or less impossible to draw (as has been briefly discussed in chapter three), so

³¹¹ Stace quoted from Havens 1964, p. 218. See also Huston Smith’s argument that “we are considering phenomenology rather than ontology, description rather than interpretation, and on this level there is no difference [between drug induced experiences and ‘genuinely’ religious experience]. Descriptively, drug experiences can not be distinguished from their natural religious counterpart.” [Smith 1968, p. 162.] The choice of the words “natural counterpart” is supposedly used to address the critical remarks that (for different reasons) have rejected drug-experiences as ‘religiously important’.

³¹² The most recent being Griffiths, Richards, McCann, and Jesse’s investigation “Psilocybin can occasion mystical type experiences having substantial and sustained personal meaning and spiritual significance”, published in *Psychopharmacology*, Springer-Verlag 2006, in which Hood’s m-scale (Hood 1975) is the main instrument of measuring the degree of “mysticism” in the experiences. In 2003 a Swedish team of doctors presented their conclusions on the issue of “The serotonin system and spiritual experiences”: “This finding in normal male subjects indicated that the serotonin system may serve as a biological basis for spiritual experiences” (in *American Journal of Psychiatry* 2003). For the relationship between the serotonin system and LSD see N. Goodman in “The serotonergic system and mysticism: could LSD and the nondrug-induced mystical experience share common neural mechanisms?” (in *Journal of psychoactive drugs* 34, 2002).

there would be no point in attempting to understand what goes on during the interpretation (or ‘conceptualization’) of experience. The relationship between an experience and its report is, in Katz’s view, a one-to-one relation. His reasons for thinking this are based partly on the assumption that it is language that creates the reported experience and partly on the assumption that it is impossible to undo the cognitive (linguistic) frameworks that invariably impinge, not only on the interpretation but on the experience itself. We will return to the issue of facilitation by language in the next section; however, before doing so, we take a quick look at some of the problems encountered by the correlation-theorists.

4.1.1. Katz and the correlational approaches

If we first look at the correlations between specific causal factors and neurobiological changes, we find constant connections between certain types of activities and specific psychophysical consequences. Running, amphetamines and emotional agitation are all separate factors that invariably cause an increase in heart rate. Thus someone who has experienced physical effort, amphetamines and emotional arousal, has also experienced what it is like to have an increase in heart rate. Likewise, activities such as meditation, fasting, extreme environmental circumstances, respiratory manoeuvres and sensory deprivation all have certain, although not necessarily the *same*, physical and biological effects. How these actively sought alterations of psychophysical functioning can be correlated to specific changes in brain chemistry and functioning remains to be mapped by natural science.³¹³ What can be said is that certain effects on a neurobiological system are – on a scale from ‘likely to occur’ to ‘certain to occur’ – consequences of specific environmental conditions that can be voluntarily or involuntarily produced. How these

³¹³ Extensive research has been done on this area; see for instance the review of Vaitl et al. on the attempts to correlate different causal factors to changes in brain functioning. The authors also recognize the category of ‘disease’ among the listed causes of altered brain states. Disease (such as schizophrenia and epilepsy, but also brain tissue damage) as a specific cause of altered brain states is more complex to discuss in terms of ‘mystical experience’ partly because they are generally not voluntarily induced and partly because they are intimately linked to severely impaired cognitive processes (Vaitl et al. 2005, p. 114.)

brain states and the general physical condition of a person relate to phenomenally experienced reality is a much more complex issue which we turn to next. With respect to Katz's *extending the understanding of the field*, it is very unlikely that the claim, "we can have different emotions produced by different circumstances", has any explanatory value relative to this particular area of correlational research. It cannot, for example, help to determine whether the *same* circumstances 'produce' either the *same* or *different* emotions, or whether *different* circumstances 'produce' the *same* emotions.

It is not our aim to contradict Katz's assertion that "we can have different emotions produced by different circumstances", but we have to ask what this means in the specific context of interpreting mystical experience. The correlation of certain brain states with conscious experience requires much more conceptual clarification than the correlation between environmental causes and various states of the brain. First of all, in order to determine a correlation between brain states and states of consciousness, the two cannot be identified with each other. We can view them as 'aspects' of one and the same 'thing', or consciousness as a 'product' of the brain, but, as Katz puts it, "the brainwave is not the same thing or equal to ecstasy or love or encounter or loss of self".³¹⁴ We do not experience 'brainwave' changes (or chemical imbalance, tissue damage, hypo- or hyper-synchronization, etc.), but rather heightened or lowered activity (as in epileptic fits or sleep states), loss of motor control, enhanced or lowered mood, and so on. Likewise, an individual report of some specific experience is not given in terms of 'tissue damage' or 'enhancement of serotonin levels', but rather in terms of pain or pleasure.³¹⁵ Yet even if brain is not 'the same' as consciousness (just as activities used to alter brain states are not equal to those brain states) there seem to be several correlational points between events or changes in brain structure and phenomenal events or changes in consciousness states.

³¹⁴ Katz 2000, quoted by Gregory in Gregory 2006, p. 33

³¹⁵ In order to discuss these issues without having to determine the exact relations between brain and consciousness, Veitl et al. express this difference in terms of 'space'. B-space is their term for brain events, while C-space is used to designate consciousness events.

In medicine, mood alterations have been traced to such causes as altered hormonal constitution or neurotransmitter imbalance. This, of course, cuts both ways: if we desire an alteration of mood, this can be attained by chemical manipulation of our hormonal constitution or transmitter substance. Caution must characterize our conclusions, however, since the complexity of both CNS and phenomenal experience do not permit us to draw simplistic or rash conclusions in either direction. The conclusion that, for instance, mood elevation can be obtained by an increase of serotonin levels (through manipulation of neurochemistry) can be wrong in many ways. Introducing serotonin to a neural system may not provide the desired results, and the effects may be much more complex than elevation of mood. Serotonin enhancement may have phenomenally experienced effects other than mood enhancement or it may not enhance mood at all, but only eliminate the 'depth' or 'intensity' of the 'mood' or 'emotional state' (so that a 'negative' as well as a 'positive' mood could be simply 'unintensified'). This means that it is not possible to conclude, merely from the fact that serotonin levels have been raised (by whatever method), that the experiences of the individual undergoing this process are tinged with an elevated mood. Likewise, an elevated mood may not indicate that something is different in the serotonin level of an individual. This, however, is beside the point. The point is that when an experience is facilitated or caused in a specific way, there is no guarantee that the same specific method will cause a similar experience if applied again to a different person or even to the same person at a later point in time. How, then, do we go about finding out whether or not a mood has been elevated? Or more generally, how do we know what an experience is like, so that we can compare two experiences in terms of similarity and difference?

William James may have altered his neural chemistry in ways he could not have imagined or conceptualised; yet, even if he had gained precise knowledge of the changes to his brain chemistry caused by the inhalation of nitrous oxide, this would not have given him any more information about the phenomenal character of the experience of inhaling nitrous oxide than he had already attained by actually inhaling it. This is not the place for an extended discussion regarding James's view of how the method of inducing a certain state affects the actual experience of that

state, but Katz seems to imply that certain methods lead to certain types of experience:

The fact is that mystical experience is not about having highs that are merely subjective. They're not about having exalted experiences like drug experiences ... Mystical experience is specifically a kind of experience which at its profoundest wants to put us in touch with ultimate realities, so that the Christian mystic doesn't want to have a brain experience. The Christian mystic wants to have a love experience in the sense of meeting Christ or God as an Other ... The Jewish mystic, the Sufi mystic, the Hindu mystic, all want to go outside themselves in the sense of making touch with something Other – whatever that other might be within the system. ... But in all cases it has to be a connection to something outside ourselves. ...mystical experience is a special kind of experience that is denied by an ontological circumstance. That is to say, the nature of mysticism is *not* what goes on inside you only, but it makes a claim to putting you into touch with ultimate realities. ...there's an ontological element, an element of a certain kind of metaphysical condition. That's why, for example, I would insist that it's very different than drug experiences...³¹⁶

'Drug experiences' are here depicted as a type of experience with certain features (like being 'exalted'), while mystical experience cannot fit into this category since it aims to "put us in touch with ultimate realities" and "has to be a connection to something outside ourselves". What confuses here is that Katz attempts to compare what, in his view, are two types of experiences, and yet appears to classify each according to a different set of criteria. The 'drug experience' is classified according to method of induction and characterized as 'inner' experience ("brain experience"), while the 'mystical experience' is characterized by its making the claim of "putting you in touch with ultimate realities". This characterization of mystical experience appears to be based partly on what type of *claim* the experiencer makes and partly on the nature of the experience itself – i.e., on it being "a connection to something outside ourselves". Does this mean that a person under the influence of a certain drug has no fair chance of having a genuine mystical experience because that experience is externally directed and drug experiences do not allow, or even prevent, authentic contact with a transcendent reality? This type of interpretation

³¹⁶ Katz in a response to Gregory, 2000, see in Gregory 2006, p. 34.

would exclude the possibility that the participants in a Native American peyote ceremony are able to reach ‘outside’ themselves and come in touch with ultimate reality “whatever that [reality] might be within the system”.³¹⁷ What would Katz recommend that Native Americans do in order to contact the spirits of their ancestors or perform a ‘curative’ session (which is also directed ‘outwards’)? Not to ingest peyote before performing the ceremony? If this is indeed what Katz intends as an outcome of his perspective, it would appear that he has failed to *show regard for the validity of Native American self-understanding*. However, it is also possible that we have misunderstood Katz on this point, in which case he could help by clarifying his view of the relationship between what is the cause of something and what is the effect (i.e., the experience). Katz’s shedding more light upon these matters would also be helpful with respect to his expressed desire to *extend the understanding of the field*.

We now come to the final correlational threshold: that of the relation between the actual experience and its report. This, as we have said, is a relation that Katz cannot analyse since he rejects the possibility of a distinction between experience and interpretation. For Katz, the report of an experience is a reflection of the experience, which in turn is a reflection of pre-experiential conditioning. This is because:

Mystical experience(s) are the *result* of traversing the mystical way(s), whatever specific *way* one happens to follow, e.g. the Jewish, Sufi, or Buddhist. What one reads, learns, knows, intends, and experiences along the path creates to some degree (let us leave this somewhat vaguely stated as yet) the *anticipated* experience made manifest. That is to say, there is an intimate, even necessary connection between the mystical and religious text studied and assimilated, the mystical experience had, and the mystical experience reported. In each mystical tradition, as in each of the larger religious communities in which the mystical traditions inhere, there is an

³¹⁷ R.E. Schultes and A. Hoffman describe in “Tracks of the little deer” (1992) the variety in American Indian peyote-ceremonies (differences between tribes as well as within the tribes): “A member may hold a meeting in gratitude for the recovery of health, the safe return from a voyage, or the success of a Peyote pilgrimage: it may be held to celebrate the birth of a baby, to name a child, on the first four birthdays of a child, for doctoring, or even for general thanksgiving.”

inherited theological-mystical education which is built upon certain agreed sources.³¹⁸

We have already mentioned that Katz considers language to be the sole facilitator of mystical experience: the language that the mystic inherits from his religious community.³¹⁹ But here Katz seems to confirm once again that the method (the “way”) necessarily leads to a certain specific result. The nature of that specific result ultimately depends on what language the mystic has inherited (what texts he has read), and although Katz never specifies the “intimate, even necessary connection” that links the ‘way’ with the experience, and further with the report of the experience, it appears that they are practically indiscernible. The report of an experience mirrors the method applied, and both method and report reflect the nature of the experience.

If we listen to the mystic’s reports, Katz argues, we can hear that their experiences are different in that they report experiences of different ‘others’, of different ‘ontological conditions’.³²⁰ The Sufi reports experiencing Allah and the Christian reports experiencing God, so their experiences cannot be similar. To understand how Katz can determine which experiences are different from or similar to one another, we must again consider not only the ‘way’ (different ways in different religious traditions), but also the specific ontological conditions in terms of which the experiential report should be analysed. Katz’s realism demands that the reports of the mystics are taken as descriptions of the realities encountered. He rejects the perennial proposition that one and the same

³¹⁸ Katz 1983a, p. 6.

³¹⁹ In “Mystical speech and mystical meaning” (1992), Katz presents different functions of language. Language is “transformational” according to Katz (pp.5-15) since it transforms the mystic consciousness; it is “power” (pp. 20-24) as it “directly aids in mystical ascents to other worlds and realms of being” (p. 20); and, finally, it is “information” in that it informs the mystic on the nature of the experience had, i.e. “language, in a variant of William James’s attribution of a noetic quality to mystical states, operates informatively” (p.24). This is where Katz explains what ‘noetic’ element there is in mystical experience: “It is used to describe, however this term is qualified – and it is, of course regularly so qualified – that ‘knowledge’ that is gained in the mystical moment.” (p. 24).

³²⁰ Compare this to the conclusion in chapter three that contrary to Gregory’s interpretation, Katz does populate reality with an “entire pantheon of metaphysical entities”. Gregory 2006, p. 271.

reality is encountered and that descriptions differ because of the different conceptualizations that different religious communities have of the same reality. In his view, since the ‘objects’ of mystical experiences partially determines those experiences, the experiences are ‘different’ from one another because their objects are different from one another. In attempting to understand the source of Katz’s certitude on this point, one is left with the conclusion that it must come either from the reports or from some other source. In terms of the former of these alternatives, it could be that because the relationship between the experience and its report is never problematized in Katz’s philosophy, he may conclude that since the reports seem to have different objects, and since these objects may very possibly be ‘real’ (in an “ontological condition” sense), they could reflect different ontological conditions as well. (It is unlikely that Katz believes the experiences of mystics to be different *because* they come from different religious traditions; such a position would exclude the type of realism Katz proposes, reducing his contextualism to mere constructivism – a label that he has consistently resisted.)³²¹ We return to the problem of Katz’s realism in chapter five. Before that, however, we focus on another factor in Katz’s position that appears to contribute to his apparent view that the method, the experience and its report are in a one-to-one relationship.

It is difficult to ascertain whether the state of the experiencer’s consciousness is of significance in Katz’s approach, or how he believes different states affect an experience independent of whether the content of experience is the same or different. If we relate this to Katz’s view that “language creates ... the operative processes through which the epistemic channels that permit mystical forms of knowing or being”³²² and look to his note on this method (or ‘way’), we find that the alternative to language as a facilitator is the ultimate reality described by the mystic’s tradition. In other words, the alternative to the altering of consciousness so as to achieve the opening of epistemic channels would be to view

³²¹ Or, perhaps this is just another effect of the general problem Katz has in combining his realist position with the contextualist.

³²² Katz 1992a, p. 8.

...mystical experience as an act of God or the transcendent that requires no prior or technical preparation, and that explains the specialness of such experience by reference to the specialness of the *object* of such experience – for example Allah or Brahman.³²³

In this view, it is Allah or Brahman (or Nirvana?) that ‘causes’ the mystical experience; in other words, the mystic’s consciousness either becomes transformed by God, etc., or it is not transformed at all, in which case he ‘knows’ his ‘object’ according to the epistemic channels of everyday experience. This explanation is perfectly all right (except, perhaps, in the case of the Buddhist and many Hindus): just as any causative factor might affect an experiencer, an interventionist God might also. But if this is Katz’s position, the question is how he can know that the experiences are *different* rather than similar, and on this basis plead for the recognition of difference. This brings us to a discussion about that ‘other source’ of certitude mentioned above.

As we see it, there are two possible explanations for Katz’s rejection of the perennialist claim that mystics experience the same ontological condition but only dress it differently according to conceptual preconditions: either he ‘knows’ that the ontological conditions are different (i.e., Allah is a different ‘ontological condition’ than Brahman), in which case he would have to explain how he ‘knows’ this; or, he is led to draw unwarranted conclusions about ultimate reality by his conviction that experience and interpretation cannot be distinguished. The necessary impact of language on mystical experience ought to imply that the ‘reality’ encountered is in some way *interpreted* by the mystic – regardless of whether it is the same reality or different realities that ‘act’ to cause an experience in the mystic. If one adopts the position that the interpretation of an experienced ‘reality’ cannot be distinguished from the experience of that ‘reality’, then one has adopted a position from which it is impossible to determine whether the encountered realities are the same or different. If mystical experience is determined and created by the language of the mystic without the involvement of an ultimate reality (or if we merely do not know the degree to which ultimate reality is involved), then the ‘object’ of experience cannot be used as the means

³²³ Katz 1992a, p. 35, n. 12

of differentiating between either the reports of mystical experiences or the experiences themselves. Nonetheless, it appears that this is precisely what Katz has attempted to do, resulting in a theory that is, in various ways, both confusing and difficult to comprehend.

4.2. Facilitating techniques and Katz's reactions

Katz's rejection of the perennialist perspective hints at how to understand some of the initially confusing elements of his approach. We have seen in the previous section that the different stages of correlation, from method to report, are not always taken into account when conclusions are drawn regarding the nature of the experience. We have also seen that both Stace and Katz draw conclusions about what a mystical experience is and how to categorize it from the experiencer's report. The difference is that Stace, whom Katz criticises for assuming similarities in the experiences of mystics, concludes that if the descriptions of two experiences are indistinguishable – regardless of how they have been induced – then the experiences cannot be dissimilar. The main difference between the two analyses is that Stace and Katz have developed completely different criteria for categorizing reports of experience. While Stace focuses on the reported descriptions of the 'phenomenological' (phenomenal in our terms) components of the experience in order to determine its nature, Katz focuses on the reports' descriptions of the 'object' of experience instead. For purposes of this discussion, we set aside the problem that Katz's notion of 'object' is difficult to understand, considering that it is simultaneously 'real' *and* constructed by conceptual pre-conditioning. Instead we focus on language as a facilitating technique for the achievement of states in which the 'epistemic channels' are changed into 'mystical form'.

It cannot be assumed that the state of a mystic's consciousness remains unchanged during a mystical event and that the 'epistemic channels' are those of ordinary experience, not even in light of Katz's alternative that the event has been caused by God with no prior 'technical preparation'. Clearly an epistemological setting that differs from ordinary experience could have been caused either by God or by some other factor (perhaps unknown to the experiencer). While Katz seems to recognize that the

‘epistemic channels’ involved in mystical experience differ from those involved in ordinary experience, he nowhere clarifies what those differences are. All the indication we get is that language “operates informatively” and the ‘noetic’ quality of experience – “that ‘knowledge’ that is gained in the mystical moment”³²⁴ – is ‘language’. Of course, this description is applicable to ordinary sense experience as well, and thus we remain uninformed as to what difference might obtain between an ordinary ‘epistemic channel’ and one that is mystical. As such, it does not provide a valid means of distinguishing between ordinary and mystical states. Perennial accounts of the ‘epistemic channels’ involved in mystical experience sometimes revolve around the idea that the ‘epistemic channels’ of ordinary experience can be suspended or reduced and that mystical experience is thus relatively free from the ordinary ‘forms of knowing and being’. Before discussing Katz’s position concerning this view, we examine the validity of Katz’s main point of criticism against the perennialists: their failure to recognize the powerful impact of ‘context’ on experience.

Most perennial interpreters of mysticism do not assert that all facilitative methods lead to the exact same state of consciousness; rather they view the contextual surroundings of the experiencer as one aspect of the facilitative process. In Roland Fischer’s conclusions regarding the ‘effects’ of chemical interaction, for instance, the role of the chemicals in inducing observed alterations seems minor in comparison with other, more contextual, factors:

...set, setting, personality, expectations, and past experiences determine the cortical ‘effects’ of most psychoactive drugs when they are used in medically endorsed dosages. In fact, except for the anaesthetics and hypnotics, there are no drugs that selectively direct human cognitive (psychological, or, in our terms, cortical) functions.³²⁵

And even before “Language, epistemology, and mysticism” was published in 1978, discussions regarding the relevance of ‘drugs’ for certain religious communities were in full bloom, with an emphasis not

³²⁴ Katz 1992a, p. 24.

³²⁵ Fischer 1971, p. 294.

only on states of consciousness, but on contextual features of experiencing as well. Thus in 1964 Joseph Havens wrote that:

...the Abyss and the Unitive Consciousness are 'knowings' shaped by three factors: personality dynamics, cultural thought-forms, and the nature of Reality. To take a psychedelic visionary experience as direct and unmediated insight into cosmic Truth is, in the light of modern knowledge, inexcusably naïve. But to interpret the vision as simply psychopathology, or cultural conditioning, or some combination of these, is inexcusably reductive.³²⁶

And in 1939 C. D. Broad wrote:

Now I think it must be admitted that, if we compare and contrast the statements made by religious mystics of various times, races, and religions, we find a common nucleus combined with very great differences of detail. Of course the interpretations which they have put on their experiences are much more varied than the experiences themselves. It is obvious that the interpretations will depend in a large measure on the traditional religious beliefs in which various mystics have been brought up. I think that such traditions probably act in two different ways.

(i) The tradition no doubt affects the theoretical interpretation of experiences which would have taken place even if the mystic had been brought up in a different tradition. A feeling of unity with the rest of the universe will be interpreted very differently by a Christian who has been brought up to believe in a personal God and by a Hindu mystic who has been trained in a quite different metaphysical tradition.

(ii) The traditional beliefs on the other hand, probably determine many of the details of the experience itself. A Roman Catholic mystic may have visions of the Virgin and the saints, whilst a Protestant mystic certainly will not.

Thus the relations between the experiences and the traditional beliefs are highly complex. Presumably the outlines of the belief are fixed for a certain place and period by the social peculiarities of the experiences had by the founder of a certain religion. These beliefs then become traditional in that religion. Thenceforth they in part determine the details of the experiences had by subsequent mystics of that religion, and still more do they determine the interpretations which these mystics will put upon their experiences. Therefore, when a set of religious beliefs have been

³²⁶ Havens 1964, p 223

established, it no doubt tends to produce experiences which can plausibly be taken as evidence for it.”³²⁷

In point (ii) Broad actually summarizes the quintessence of Katz’s contextual approach. Nonetheless, Broad’s view appears to be more in keeping with that of the perennialists since he initiates his discussion on contextual influences by assuming a ‘common core’ or “common nucleus” that is prevalent in “statements made by religious mystics of various times, races, and religions”. Broad also seems to recognize the difference between an experience and its interpretation, and also mentions the complexity of the relation between traditional beliefs and the experiences had. In point (i), he even goes so far as to claim that the experiences “would have taken place even if the mystic had been brought up in a different tradition”. In light of this, it appears that Katz’s criticisms regarding the methodological monism of perennialists and their failure to account for contextual influences on the mystic’s experience are not supported by actual theoretical accounts.

In his account, Katz insists upon the necessary connection between the mystic’s religious context (language, expectations, etc.) and the mystic’s experience; in perennial models, on the other hand, the connection is not necessary at all. In the following quotation, Richard Havens illustrates how complex the issue is by noting that neither expectation nor pre-experiential religious conditioning necessitates that one will have an actual experience of the expected:

In some settings even religious persons fail to have transcendent experiences. Interest in or expectations of having them does not seem to induce them. On the other hand, in favourable setting, many subjects not religious in their interest or motivation find that transcendental or mystical terminology is the only one in which they can conceptualize what has happened to them. We simply do not yet understand what personality variables are significant in determining who, under what conditions, will experience a mystical state.³²⁸

From the above discussion it appears that Katz’s interpretation of the perennialist approaches is mistaken in many respects, and since his

³²⁷ Broad 1953 (1939), p. 193. On p. 194 there is also an analogy to sense-perception and how it is determined by beliefs.

³²⁸ Havens 1964, p. 224.

contextualism has been largely constructed as a reaction to (this mistaken understanding of) the perennial approach, it is not surprising that certain of his passages are difficult to understand. His insistence that mystical experience is not 'brain experience' artificially separates differently facilitated experiences and this seems to confuse rather than assist the process of understanding, identifying and classifying mystical experiences.

Katz's recognition of the importance of context seems to have been already anticipated by certain perennialists, as can be seen from the quotation from Broad. The difference seems to be that while perennialists view the issue of context with a certain degree of sensitivity and a healthy dose of respect for its complexities, Katz does not. Moreover, the 'perennialists' seem to have developed a broader frame of interpretation that appears to be more 'inclusive' than Katz's contextualism. In our view, if Katz merely accepted the distinction between experience and interpretation, the explanatory power of his approach would increase and also become more subtle: needed virtues of a perspective that attempts to combine both realism and contextualism in one approach. On the other hand, by denying this distinction he simultaneously denies perennial interpretations their explanatory value.

4.2.1. *Katz and deautomatization*

Where perennialists argue for 'noetic' quality in mystical experience, where they argue for a multiplicity of factors that, taken together in complex constellations, *may* facilitate certain states of experiencing that have similar (reported) phenomenal characteristics, Katz replaces these factors with 'language'. Language, Katz argues in "Mystical speech, mystical meaning" (1992), is capable of transforming consciousness into mystic ways of knowing and being. By this, Katz rejects the perennial interpretation that mystics somehow experience reality in non-linguistic ways, that they somehow undo their conceptual preconditioning and have what may be called 'pure' experiences. One explanation for this type phenomenon is what Arthur Deikman calls 'deautomatization': the process of *undoing* the automatic responses to our surroundings (including conceptual 'responses') through meditation, drugs and other means that may have a 'deconditioning' effect.³²⁹ Without directly

³²⁹ See for instance Arthur J. Deikman: "Deautomatization and the mystic experience", first published in *Psychiatry*, Vol. 29, 1966 (pp. 324-38). Deikman claims, with respect to

referring to Deikman, Katz strongly rejects the notion that something like deautomatization is taking place when mystics use various methods to induce alternative forms of consciousness:

For it is in appearance only that such activities as yoga produce the desired state of 'pure' consciousness. Properly understood, yoga, for example, is *not* an *unconditioning* or *deconditioning* of consciousness, but rather a *reconditioning* of consciousness, i.e. a substituting of one form of conditioned and/or contextual consciousness for another ...³³⁰

By concluding that what yoga practitioners regard as the 'deconditioning' of consciousness is really its 'reconditioning' instead, Katz seems to imply that these practitioners do not really understand what they are doing and/or talking about. And one might well ask how Katz has attained a more profound insight than yoga practitioners regarding what they experience. This line of argument also appears to exhibit a lack of regard for the *validity of self-understanding*.

Apart from the issue of self-understanding, let us attempt to comprehend what Katz is driving at in the above quotation. It is not hard to understand his view of 'deconditioning' as a rejection of the possibility of gradually reducing the (automatic inset of) our interpretive pattern and a conviction that the results of yoga merely involve the supplanting of one interpretive pattern (read, 'language') with another. Thus Katz believes that rather than transcending the confines of 'language', the practitioner (regardless of technique) is limited to only replacing one language with another. This brings to mind our example of the anthropologist in section 1.2.5. who, wishing to 'go native', confronts a similar problem. It also bears upon our discussion concerning the possibility of the phenomenological reduction.

If the notion of 'deconditioning' is understood in this way, we must ask what 'reconditioning' is – i.e., how does this substitution of one contextual consciousness for another take place and what happens to the 'old' contextual consciousness after it has been replaced by the 'new'

the facilitative aspects of mystical experience, that they are also culturally conditioned (e.g. practices of 'renunciation' like fasting, poverty, isolation and the giving up of worldly pleasures), though the psychobiological effects give rise to similar characteristics in phenomenal experience.

³³⁰ Katz 1978a, p. 57.

one? Whether or not ‘deconditioning’ eventually leads to ‘pure consciousness’ is not necessarily the point (we can never know *whether* it has occurred, *who* did it, nor *what it felt like* when actualized). If Katz claims that *deconditioning* involves the replacement of one interpretive pattern with another, then this can mean either of two things: either the ‘old’ interpretive pattern is irreducible, in which case it is not replaced at all, but only complemented by the other; or, the ‘old’ interpretive pattern can be eliminated, in which case the *deconditioning* of consciousness should be hypothetically possible, with the reservation that after the *deconditioning* the experience is not necessarily *unconditioned*.

Katz’s insistence on the impossibility of *deconditioning* thus leads back to the question of precisely how the so-called *reconditioning* of consciousness is thought to occur – i.e., how the process of substituting one interpretive pattern for another takes place. If Katz means to say that the ‘old’ interpretive pattern is not gone but complements the ‘new’ one, what effect does the old interpretive pattern have on the new one? If, on the other hand, he means to say that the ‘old’ interpretive pattern has been replaced by the ‘new’ one, he would at least have to admit that it is possible for an interpretive pattern to be eliminated. And if it is possible to eliminate an interpretive pattern in the process of replacing it with another interpretive pattern, why should it not be possible to simply eliminate it *without* replacing it at all?

Since Katz does away with one type of explanation by rejecting the possibility of *deconditioning*, it would be good if he were to replace it with another. And if ‘*reconditioning*’ is proffered as that explanation, it would be good if Katz were to specify the characteristics of the reconditioned “form of conditioned/contextual consciousness” that makes it different from the ordinary conditioned form. In addition, we must ask what it is about the ‘specific-ness’ of the replacement interpretive pattern that makes the mystic’s experience specifically mystical. In other words, what is it about the ‘other’ or the ‘new’ “form of conditioned/contextual consciousness” that makes it a typically *mystical* form of consciousness?

In response to this latter question, Katz might answer, ‘religious language’: the mystic receives training in the religious tradition through

the religious community and thus experiences reality through the language that has transformed her consciousness and informs her as to what has been experienced; in other words, the specific religious literature of each religious tradition makes possible an experience of transcendent realities ('language as power'),³³¹ thereby informing the mystic as to what has been experienced.³³² With all this weight being placed on language in Katz's account, another question naturally arises: how is 'language' acquired? What is it that the mystic must do in order to interpret and understand the more profound meanings in religious texts so as to be able to experience accordingly? How can we be sure that the mystic's interpretation of the text is in line with our own, so that if we have a proper understanding of the *text* we also have a proper understanding of the *experience*? Whether, in the process of yoga, one interpretive pattern is either complemented or eliminated by another, any interpretive pattern must somehow be acquired; and if the interpretive patterns of persons (or the common use of 'language' in a given community) is not 'given', some process of acquisition must take place. What is it that happens during the practice of yoga that makes the practitioner's interpretive pattern (or 'language' or 'conditioning') *different* from the interpretive pattern he had before practicing yoga? The fact that Katz makes no comment on this process could indicate that he considers the language to be 'given' and in no need of interpretation. This possibility will be discussed in the next chapter.

Katz never discusses his own interpretive pattern, and what role it may or may not play in his interpretation of mystical reports. Because he has not ventured to make his own conditioned/contextual perspective explicit, the metaphysical presuppositions he brings to the task of interpretation could potentially interfere with his capacity to do full justice to the mystical experience reports he reviews.

³³¹ Katz 1992a, p. 20: "Language as power is one of the elemental employments of language in mystical traditions. [...] In this context, words have locomotive power. They transport the spiritual self from the world below in the world above."

³³² Katz 1992a, p. 24: "In addition to the transformative, magical, and theurgical tasks language regulatively performs in the world's mystical traditions, language, in a variant of William James's attribution of a noetic quality to mystical states, operates informatively."

4.3. Conclusions and summary

Our primary aim in this chapter has been to evaluate whether Katz's theory can *extend the understanding of the field*. To this end, we have looked at the current attempts of various disciplines to enhance the understanding of mystical phenomena and have found them to be largely based on the perennial characteristics of mystical experience. Correlational approaches seek to investigate relations between consciousness states that are induced in certain ways, and also to find similarities between phenomenal qualities in experience and given neurobiological states. To address similarities in phenomenal qualities of experience, it is of course necessary to interpret the reports of subjects undergoing various types of physical changes. The interpretation of these reports is the main issue of controversy between Katz and the perennialists. Because Katz's theory points us towards the linguistic features in these reports as well as the 'external' references to the expressions used, it bars many possibilities of interpreting mystical experiences in ways that *show regard for the validity of self-understanding*. Katz's aim to *extend the understanding of the field* is also threatened by his rejection of the phenomenal characteristics of experience, since without the characteristics mentioned on the perennial lists the correlational approaches would lack the correlative point that potentially gives meaning to the results achieved in differentiating neurobiological states. This would amount to a *regress* rather than an *extension* of understanding.

Concerning the possibility of deautomatizing interpretive patterns, Katz's position appears to imply that this is not possible. The claim that *yoga* is a *reconditioning* rather than a *deconditioning* of consciousness appears to indicate a *lack of regard for the validity of self-understanding*, since yoga practitioners do indeed claim that they are able to *decondition* their consciousness. If interpreted as a claim that an old interpretive pattern is replaced by a new one, Katz's theory appears self-contradictory because on the one hand it implies that language is 'given' to mystics and those that interpret mystical experience reports, and on the other hand it denies the possibility of uninterpreted 'givenness'.

Chapter 5

The outcome of mystical experience

Introduction to chapter five

...the man who comes back through the Door in the Wall will never be quite the same as the man who went out. He will be wiser but less cocksure, happier but less self-satisfied, humbler in acknowledging his ignorance yet better equipped to understand the relationship of words to things, of systematic reasoning to the unfathomable Mystery which it tries, forever vainly, to comprehend.

Aldous Huxley

On the positive side, mystical experiences are regarded as having been beneficial relative to both the individual and the greater institutions of religion. Psychologists and sociologists of religion have investigated the positive influences of mystical experience in terms of their helping to 'cope' with crises or long term stress and enabling 'personal transformation', 'creativity', and innovative contributions to scientific, philosophical and religious systems.³³³ And perennial philosophers have emphasised the moral and cognitive awakenings of religious giants such as Siddhartha, Moses, Saint Augustine and others – a moral awakening that, in turn, has had a positive cultural and religious impact on their societies. Robert Forman, for one, claims to have achieved a permanent

³³³ See for instance Batson/Schoenrade/Ventis 1993: "A given religious experience may allow the individual to deal more positively and effectively with a wider range of experiences and people." (p. 107)

dualistic mystical state as a result of the post-experiential (post-PCE) integration of mystical consciousness into everyday life.

On the negative side, mystical experiences have been considered responsible for heresies in religious systems, antinomic and revolutionary thinking in socio-political systems, and pathological states of mind in individuals. Katz views such negative interpretations as the “incorrect construal” of ‘amorality’, which is

...yet another distorted and distorting manifestation of the still more universal misapprehension that mystics are arch-individualists, ‘Lone Rangers’ of the spirit, whose sole intention is to escape the religious environments that spawned them in order to find personal liberation or salvation. Accordingly mystics are portrayed as rebels and heretics, antinomians and spiritual revolutionaries if not also underminers of existing social and religious structures.³³⁴

Negative interpretations of mystical experiences are sometimes based on a particular view of the method used for their facilitation, sometimes on the phenomenal characteristics of a particular experience, and sometimes on accounts that emphasise the experience’s negative effects. The extent to which valid correlations can be made between a particular type of experience and its outcome is limited, and the reports and behaviour of the experiencers should play a large part in how these experiential events are interpreted and understood. A positively interpreted experience need not result in a positively interpreted outcome; and a negatively interpreted qualitative experience need not lead to a negatively interpreted outcome. Likewise, a religious experience need not lead to a religious life-style and a psychotic experience need not lead to a schizophrenic or ‘psychotic’ lifestyle. Of course, the classification of a specific experience in the terms mentioned above largely influences the type of interpretation it receives as far as facilitation and outcome are concerned. This role, however, is not a determinant one, as there are other important influences that may lead from the mystical experience to different outcomes.

The social and religious context of the mystic clearly plays a major role in the process of differentiating between types of experiences and reports,

³³⁴ Katz 1992b, p. 253.

as does the doctrinal context in which the reports appear (whether they are religious, psychological, political or socio-economic). And, as discussed in chapters three and four, Katz argues for the primary importance of contextual and doctrinal contributions in terms of both classifying the experience and understanding its causal factors. Katz's emphasis on context and doctrine does not change when it comes to classifying the *outcome* of mystical experience, resulting in the view that mysticism is conservative with regard to doctrinal content. This chapter consists of an evaluation of this point of view and the extent to which it may or may not contribute to the interpretation of mystical experience and mystical experience reports.

In chapter four we examined the question of the relationship between pre-experiential beliefs (context of facilitation) and the given experience, and attempted to challenge Katz's view that it is a one-to-one relation. In this chapter we examine Katz's views on the relationship between experience and post-experiential outcomes in terms of both first- and second-hand experience reports. And here again Katz's realism has major implications with regard to how his interpretation of mystical reports should be understood. The theoretical inconsistency involved in the apparent combining of contextualism and realism makes it difficult to comprehend Katz's understanding of the cognitive aspect in mystical experience. Since Katz rejects the criticism that his theory amounts to a case of non-cognitivism, we aim to investigate this claim further by looking at Katz's account of the outcome of mystical experience.

5.1. Mystical Knowledge

Both mystics and perennial interpreters of mystical experience claim that there is a 'noetic' quality to mystical experience, and that this noetic quality is responsible for the dramatic changes in the lives of those who experience them, potentially leading to social, moral and religious reform. Renowned religious figures such as Jesus, Mohammad and Siddhartha have managed to transform already existing religious structures, and if these individuals are classified as mystics this would appear to contradict Katz's claim that mysticism is a conservative phenomenon. Although Katz's realism has been discussed several times

above, as yet there has been no clear indication regarding what he believes mystics know about reality. Thus far, Katz has emphasised that mystics are

...fully situated in the ontological theological and social contexts of their traditions. Essentially, they share the *Weltanschauung* of their inherited circumstance and seek to realise, experience, the 'solutions' proposed by their tradition.³³⁵

From this it appears that Katz believes that mystics experience what is suggested to them by a given religious context – i.e., the text shapes the experience and the experience is mirrored in the report. Since Katz seems to hold that there is a one-to-one relationship between an experience and its report, this can only mean that the mystic's report is a reflection of the 'Weltanschauung' of his inherited circumstance. If the report is 'cognitive' in the sense that mystics are informed by the same 'language' about what they *actually* experience on the one hand and what they *have* experienced on the other, it would seem that 'reality' has no place in this process and Katz's constructivism is exposed. However, since Katz claims possible realism for any of the reports that mystics provide (which when combined with his 'cognitivism' amounts to a type of cognitive realism), how are we to understand the following:

...no veridical propositions can be generated on the basis of mystical experience. As a consequence it appears certain that mystical experience is not and logically cannot be the grounds for *any* final assertions about the nature or truth of any religious or philosophical position nor, more particularly, for any specific dogmatic or theological belief. Whatever validity mystical experience has, it does not translate itself into 'reasons' which can be taken as evidence for a given religious proposition. Thus, in the final analysis, mystical or more generally religious experience is irrelevant in establishing the truth or falsity of religion in general or any specific religion in particular.³³⁶

If the experiences of mystics are interpreted as constructed from the 'Weltanschauung' of the mystic, while 'language' is the 'noetic' (cognitive) aspect of (and vehicle for) the experience,³³⁷ the outcome, which is

³³⁵ Katz 1992b, p. 253.

³³⁶ Katz 1978a, p. 22.

³³⁷ Katz 1992a, p. 24.

expressed in the same ‘language’, must be an expression of the religion or philosophy that has formed the experience. In this way, we can interpret Katz as saying that mystical experience does not function as a guarantee that religions and philosophical systems are true. This, in turn, could mean either that (a) religious and philosophical systems cannot be verified by experience because nothing really verifies them, or (b) that experience of the ‘contents’ in philosophical and religious systems cannot verify their ‘truth or falsity’ because *experience* (in general) is not verificational. Both these possible interpretations will be examined in what follows.

A number of authors on religious experience have argued that if we consider ordinary experience foundational for belief, then we should consider mystical experience foundational as well. C. D. Broad, for example, argues this in “Arguments for the existence of God”; and William P. Alston affirms in several works that both ordinary *and* mystical experiences are to be perceived as justificational for religious beliefs. Richard Swinburne concludes that “one who has had a religious experience apparently of God has, by the Principle of Credulity, good reason for believing that there is a God”³³⁸ and that “religious perceptual claims deserve to be taken as seriously as perceptual claims of any other kind”.³³⁹ Katz has not specified the nature of the relationship between mystical and ordinary experience,³⁴⁰ but, in any case, it seems that his aim is to set standards for *mystical* and not ordinary experience.

As far as the ‘realism’ in Katz’s philosophy is concerned, we saw in chapters three and four that he rejects ‘subjectivism’, which is the main reason that he distances himself from phenomenology, understood as a philosophy concerned with ‘subjective’ truths.³⁴¹ Katz also claims that

³³⁸ Swinburne 1979, p. 275.

³³⁹ Swinburne 1979, p. 276.

³⁴⁰ See A2 in section 2.2.: “...we need to recognize that mystical experience is not exactly like ‘experience in general.’ But it is not altogether different either.” This, unfortunately, does not explain *how* they are different or in what way they are similar.

³⁴¹ According to Katz, phenomenologists *think* they arrive at objective truths because they believe they obtain insight into metaphysical truth by intuiting the ‘given’. In his view, they are mistaken on this point, and all they achieve in actuality is merely subjective impressions.

the world cannot be a creation of the mind, a subjective world in which ‘appearances’ are of ‘appearances’, this time with reference to Kantianism:

Kantianism, *the* dominant philosophical spirit of the last two centuries, is in any form, and let me assert this as clearly as I can, incompatible with a viable Jewish philosophical outlook. ... If the self *creates* the world it inhabits, then the only result can be an unacceptable subjectivism, a knowing only of ‘appearances’ or the ‘appearances’ of ‘appearances’.³⁴²

This is not the place to initiate a discussion on whether or not Kant considered “that the self creates the world it inhabits” (although, at least at a first glance, it seems to be an incorrect interpretation of Kant). What Katz seems to say here, however, is that reality is not constructed, so if experience in general is affirmative or negative in relation to propositional truth, the above denial that mystical experience cannot ‘be translated into reasons’ must be read as a delimitation of mystical experience – i.e., that the epistemological considerations concern *mystical* experience and not experience in general. If it is a polemical assertion that mystics cannot validate religious truths, we must ask why? The above mentioned authors, among others, have invested considerable intellectual effort to establish that there is no reason to exclude that mystical or religious experiences can justify beliefs to the same extent that ordinary experience can. If Katz’s aim is to contradict this thesis, he needs to offer a firm argument showing why mystical experience does not have the same justificational capacities as any other experience. The fact that this argument is missing in Katz’s writings necessitates an investigation of the epistemological processes that prevent mystical experience from being ‘cognitive’, in the sense that I have interpreted this term. In our email exchange, Katz pointed out that I had “misinterpreted [his] view that mystical experience cannot be ‘translated

³⁴² Katz quoted by Gregory 2006, p. 73. Gregory explains: “... Kantianism in all its forms must be firmly rejected in the task of metaphysics and a realist ontology take its place. The empirical and historical, in other words, need to be thought of as fundamentally *real*. Kant’s basic outlook that space and time are subjective in nature and that the objects of human knowledge are mere appearances of the real is, in Katz’s view, ‘a disaster’.” Unfortunately this seems to show that Katz has not properly understood Kant’s position and misses the distinction between epistemology and metaphysics.

into reasons' as meaning they are non-cognitive".³⁴³ Accepting Katz's self-understanding here, this is one mistake we do not wish to repeat. Nonetheless we must question what it is about mystical experience in particular – what type of cognitivity, what novel feature – that prevents mystics from expressing truths that either affirm or contradict their religious context. To avoid misunderstanding the meaning that Katz ascribes to the terms 'veridical proposition', 'reasons' and 'truth or falsity of religion', we once again quote (in a more complete form) Katz's answer as to why the inability of mystical experiences to validate religious truths does not exclude them from being cognitive:

No - you have misinterpreted my view that mystical experience cannot be "translated into reasons" as meaning they are non-cognitive. The cognitive nature of these claims is not the issue - one can have cognitive claims that are not verifiable and thus cannot serve as decisive proof of an argument. Cognitivity and verifiability, etc., are concepts that must be distinguished. You conflate them incorrectly.³⁴⁴

Point well taken: 'verifiability' and 'cognitivity' are not the same – a very sound position that I also accept. The fact that the truth-value of a sentence cannot be determined does not mean that the sentence lacks truth conditions (meaning). The truth conditions of a sentence generated by mystical experience, then, are the cognitive elements of that experience. "Reasons", then, does not mean truth-conditions but rather truth values. If we go even further and analyse this in terms of 'cognitivity' and 'knowledge', it must mean that mystical experiences are cognitive, but that the propositions generated by such experiences are not to be classified as 'knowledge'; that is, they are not useful as 'evidence' of the truth or falsity (in a realistic, metaphysical sense, I assume) of any religious or philosophical system of beliefs, *because* these propositions cannot be verified.

³⁴³ Chapter 2, Section 2.2, Answer A13

³⁴⁴ See Chapter 2, Section 2.2, Answer A12 . The question was: "A final question that has puzzled me is whether you consider that mystical experiences are cognitive or not. That the mystical experience can not be "translated into reasons" I have interpreted as "mystical experiences are non-cognitive". Some of your interpreters claim this is not so. Do you consider the mystical experiences cognitive or cognition-generating?"

Now that we have a possible explanation of what Katz might mean when claiming that mystical experience is cognitive though not translatable into reasons, two new concerns arise: 1) Katz's rejection of the 'positivist-like' interpretations of mystical experience, and 2) Katz's use of the mystical reports as 'evidence' that his position is correct. We start with Katz's distancing himself from "positivist-like rejections of [mystical] experience as 'nonsense'".³⁴⁵

The interpretation just described does not allow us to interpret Katz as a positivist: if mystical experience is cognitive and can generate truth conditional propositions, it cannot reasonably be 'nonsensical' but rather meaningful. However, Katz leans more towards a positivist position than any other epistemological position that can be held, and this is because of his insistence upon the verifiability of mystical claims as a criterion for 'knowledge'. Epistemological discussions generally take their starting point in a notion of knowledge as *true, justified belief*. At first glance, this may seem to be a simple way of considering whether or not something is knowledge: the proposition 'God is merciful' is *true* if it is a correct ontological description (a description of an "ontological state of affairs" that Katz claims is a possibility); it is also a piece of *knowledge* if, for instance, Mystic Mary *believes* this to be true and is additionally *justified* in believing so. A 'belief' then, is truth conditional and, as such, cognitive and meaningful. However, if it lacks justification and/or is not true, it cannot be called 'knowledge'. This, I assume, is how Katz wants us to understand his proposition that "mystical experience cannot be translated into reasons".³⁴⁶

As already mentioned, epistemologists like Alston, Broad and Swinburne consider *experience* to justify beliefs, so that if Mary has an experience of

³⁴⁵ Katz 1978a, p. 3.

³⁴⁶ See for instance Edmund Gettier's discussion "Is justified true belief knowledge?" in Paul K. Moser's (ed.): *Empirical Knowledge Readings in contemporary epistemology*, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1996). Gettier argues that the criteria are insufficient. Whether the fulfilment of all of these conditions is either necessary or sufficient in order to call a given proposition 'knowledge' is a constant point of controversy in epistemological debates. However, it is best to keep it simple here. Thus I leave for some other occasion a discussion regarding the necessity and/or sufficiency of 'true, justified belief' as criteria for knowledge.

God's being merciful, then she is justified in *believing* that 'God is merciful'. It is difficult to tell from the quotation above whether Katz considers *experience* to be a proper justificational basis for a certain religious or philosophical *belief*. The sentence, "Whatever validity mystical experience has, it does not translate itself into 'reasons' which can be taken as evidence for a given religious proposition"³⁴⁷ can be interpreted as a rejection of the evidential value of experience, though this interpretation may not so much depend on what meaning we ascribe to 'reasons', but rather on what we mean by 'evidence' and who the 'evidence' is for. Under ordinary circumstances we would take an experience of sunshine as 'evidence' that the sentence "The sun is shining" is true, and we would believe that we are justified in doing so. If we add to this Swinburne's Principle of Credulity,³⁴⁸ we find that there are good reasons to think that a person's experience of sunshine would justify her belief that the sentence "The sun is shining" is true, and perhaps also consider her utterance to be 'evidential' for our belief that "the sun is shining" – *unless* we have reasons to believe that the person reporting the experience has some reason to lie or is perceptually distorted or incapacitated.

Since it is unlikely that Katz believes mystics to be either hallucinating or lying, we can proceed by replacing 'reasons' with 'verifiable propositions' in the sentence, "Whatever validity mystical experience has, it does not translate itself into 'reasons' which can be taken as evidence for a given religious proposition." If *only* verifiable propositions can be taken as evidence for a given religious proposition, *experience* becomes altogether irrelevant (which confirms the interpretation that experience cannot justify beliefs). Here we must leave the matter more or less unresolved, since it is difficult to imagine a single case of 'verifying' anything that does not involve 'experience'.

Nonetheless, the fact that Katz seems to require 'verification' as a criterion for 'knowledge' causes his theory to veer more to the positivist side. If, as Katz claims, "one can have cognitive claims that are not

³⁴⁷ Katz 1978a, p. 22.

³⁴⁸ Swinburne 1979, p. 254.

verifiable”,³⁴⁹ it should also be possible to make truth claims that are not verifiable. According to classical epistemological criteria, a justified belief is ‘knowledge’ if it is also true (i.e., if it corresponds to some ‘ontological condition’ in terms of a realist correspondence theory of truth). Katz, on the other hand, seems to require that a belief should be ‘verified’ in order to “serve as decisive proof of an argument”.³⁵⁰

However, the problem of verification is more fundamental than that. What does it mean to say that a ‘proposition’ can be verified? In Katz’s usage, verification is explained in this way:

There are major, perhaps insuperable, problems involved in the issue of trying to verify mystical claims, if by verification we mean the strong thesis that independent grounds for the claimed event/experience can be publicly demonstrated. Indeed, it seems to me, *though I will not try to justify this position here*, that it is not possible to provide ‘verification’ of this sort.³⁵¹

Whatever ‘independent grounds’ may mean in this statement, it is clearly not possible to publicly demonstrate that a claimed event/experience has factually occurred, and there are various reasons why. Although this is not the place for the presentation of exhaustive arguments and examples in this connection, two general problems bear mentioning.

First, verification, in the few cases where it is possible, occurs when a person, independent of the method used, *verifies* by having *an experience* upon which a claim is based. This takes place not by ‘public demonstration’, but rather through instruments of measurement used together with logical deductions whereby one concludes from observing an ‘effect’ that the ‘cause’ is highly likely to have occurred.³⁵² This brings us back to the question of why mystical experiences should be considered non-‘verificational’ – i.e., why a mystical experience cannot

³⁴⁹ See Chapter 2. Section 2.2, Answer A12.

³⁵⁰ See Chapter 2. Section 2.2, Answer A12.

³⁵¹ Katz 1978a, p. 22.

³⁵² Ian Hacking’s *Representing and intervening – introductory topics in the philosophy of natural science* (1983) serves as background material here. In it he defines scientific natural realism as follows: “We shall count as real what we can use to intervene in the world to affect something else, or what the world can use to affect us” (p. 146.).

be an instance of ‘verification’ of some claimed ‘truth’, religious, philosophical or any other?

Second, one must question what this has to do with mystical experience in particular. Even if it is true that mystical experiences cannot be verified, non-verifiability does not seem to be a delimitating feature of only these types of experiences; thus the specific claim that *mystical* experience cannot be verified seems without purpose. That is, of course, unless Katz means to say that the characteristic of non-verifiability only pertains to *mystical*, as opposed to *ordinary*, experience. In such case, however, he would then have to explain how ordinary experience claims are to be verified and why these verificational procedures do not apply to specifically mystical experiences. He would have to explain, in other words, the specific characteristics that make mystical experiences *different* from ordinary experiences in this respect.³⁵³

Without further information or clarification regarding the problems depicted above, it is difficult to make sense of Katz’s assertion that a mystical experience must be verifiable in order for it to be viewed as “grounds for *any* final assertions about the nature or truth of any religious or philosophical position.”³⁵⁴ We now turn to another puzzling component in Katz’s argumentation.

The claim that propositions gleaned from mystical experiences cannot serve as grounds for assertions about the truth of any religious or philosophical position appears at the beginning of “Language, epistemology and mysticism”. Indeed it is the claim that inaugurates Katz’s proposal for a contextual, as opposed to a perennial,

³⁵³ Since Katz insists on rejecting ‘subjectivism’ (‘appearances’ of ‘appearances’ of ‘appearances’) and holds that mystical experience should be analysed as a “distinctive ontological condition” (Katz in interview with Haberman 1994, quoted from Gregory 2006, p. 208), we are reluctant to interpret the emphasis on non-verifiability as a claim that mystical experience is ‘subjective’ by nature (*and* in contrast to ordinary experience), and therefore unverifiable. If Katz means to say that the mystical claims refer to ‘ontological conditions’ in other ‘realms’ or ‘ultimate realities’, it still does not explain why the mystical experience cannot be a confirmation (or ‘verification’) of the ‘truths’ expressed with reference to those ultimate realities.

³⁵⁴ Katz 1978a, p. 22.

interpretation of mystical experience. The final touch in “Language, epistemology and mysticism” is the claim that

...our position is able to accommodate *all* the evidence which is accounted for by non-pluralistic accounts without being reductionistic, i. e. it is able to do more justice to the specificity of the evidence and its inherent distinctions and disjunctions than can the alternative approaches. That is to say, our account neither (a) overlooks any evidence, nor (b) has any need to simplify the available evidence to make it fit into comparative or comparable categories, nor (c) does it begin with a priori assumptions about the nature of ultimate reality.³⁵⁵

The apparent ‘evidence’ that Katz refers to in these concluding words – the ‘evidence’ that he has presented throughout “Language, epistemology and mysticism” in support of his contextualist approach – consists of a relatively small number of reports that he considers as indicative of mystical experiences. This manner of confirming contextualism does not change in Katz’s later writings. In “The conservative character of mystical experience” (1983), for example, Katz notes:

...enough evidence and analysis has been introduced at least to throw suspicion on those approaches to mystical experience which treat these experiences in non-contextual ways.³⁵⁶

Katz’s position can be viewed as a philosophical one that asserts certain ‘truths’. For example, Katz asserts that the contextual approach to the interpretation of mystical experience is more accurate, more useful, more true to the phenomenon under study than other types of approaches. This is all well and good. However, can his selection of mystical experience reports (the ‘evidence’ he refers to) serve as a basis for final assertions on the ‘truths’ of his philosophical position? This question is quite independent of the question of whether or not the propositions generated from mystical experiences can be verified. And if Katz’s contextual approach is to have any genuine content, either mystical experience reports *can* generate propositions that can serve as ‘*evidence*’ for the efficacy of that approach (which, however, contradicts the proposition that began his analysis), or mystical experience reports *cannot*

³⁵⁵ Katz 1978a, p. 66.

³⁵⁶ Katz 1983a, p. 51.

generate propositions that can serve as '*evidence*' for the efficacy of that approach (in which case Katz's analysis fails to prove or explain anything because it is based on unverifiable propositions).

The final section of this chapter examines other possible outcomes of mystical experiences that are related to the 'knowledge' and 'cognitivity' aspects of mystical claims. In this regard, the claim is frequently made by mystics and perennial interpreters that the 'knowledge' acquired through mystical experience is associated with a certain 'radicality' or 'novelty', by which they mean that it is not merely a confirmation or repetition of previously held beliefs, doctrinal understandings and/or traditional views, but something religiously new and original. Such 'additions' hold the possibility of being either confirming of or contradictory to traditional beliefs; in the latter case, this can lead to allegations of heresy. On a less grandiose scale, there are also strong, if not necessary, indications that one who has a mystical experience undergoes some form of personal transformation in which her moral consciousness and behaviour is positively changed. The 'new' cognitive content of the mystical consciousness is said to be responsible for this positive change; it is also seen as a factor that distinguishes genuine mystical experiences from other forms of altered consciousness – e.g., pathologically induced experiences like psychoses.³⁵⁷ Katz throws new light on these views by claiming that mystical experience conserves traditional religious beliefs, and that in the end 'visions' and 'auditions' cannot be trusted. We now examine both perspectives on these intriguing possible outcomes of mystical experience.

5.2. Moral awakenings

Clearly the 'religious radicalism' of mystics has been highly emphasised in the accounts of perennial philosophers; and mystics have been frequently depicted as those who may yet save the world from misery by putting an end to separation, egocentricity and inequality.³⁵⁸ Katz describes the perennial account as follows:

³⁵⁷ Veitl et al. 2005, suggest that the psychopathologically induced experiences are likely to result in non-cognitive interpretive structures.

³⁵⁸ See Huxley, for instance. Zaehner disagrees.

It is commonplace of the study of mysticism to see it as the paradigm of religious individualism and radicalism. The mystic, it is said, is the great religious rebel who undermines the orthodox establishment, placing his own experience above the doctrines of the accepted authorities, and who not infrequently engenders serious opposition even to the point of being put to death for heresy. The martyrdom of Al Hallaj and similar episodes are highlighted in almost all descriptions of mysticism.³⁵⁹

To counterbalance what he sees as a one-sided conception of mysticism, Katz places emphasis on the conservative character of mystical experience instead:

These incidents [the martyrdom of many mystics] must *not* be taken as presenting the entire account, however, nor even as representing the typical relation between mysticism and established religion, for the relationship(s) of the two are far more varied and dialectical than is usually appreciated. This paper will examine this dialectic, showing in the process that, while it is true that mysticism, in its many different guises, contains elements of radical challenge to established religious authority and tradition, at the same time it also embodies characteristics which are anything but radical. And it is on these normally neglected features, which I have chosen to label 'conservative,' which this study will focus. Let me assert my position clearly lest misunderstanding arise: it is not my intention to argue that mysticism, or more accurately mysticisms, is *only* a conservative phenomenon; rather, the aim of this paper is to reveal the two-sided nature of mysticism, that it is a dialectic that oscillates between the innovative and traditional poles of religious life.³⁶⁰

In section 1.4 we discussed how heresy and obedience are consequences not only of the character and content of a given mystical experience, but of a combination of these with the social and religious system of which the experiencer is a part. As can be seen from the above passages, Katz clearly thinks that it is in the nature of mysticism to oscillate between the traditional and the innovative poles of religious life, and that both conservatism and radicalism are characteristic of mystical experience. In this way, however, it is easy to overlook other important factors that can contribute to the rise of 'heresies' and 'radicalism',³⁶¹ factors like: the

³⁵⁹ Katz 1983, p. 3.

³⁶⁰ Katz 1983, p. 3.

³⁶¹ Although Katz does not deny the radical potential of mystical experience, in reading through his article, it is difficult to find much discourse on the radical side of the

degree to which liberty of interpretation is accepted within the mystic's religious system, the manner in which society interprets both the religious system and the mystic, the strictness of the '*laws*' within a specific religious tradition and many other contextual circumstances.³⁶² Taking such conditions into account when claiming that an experience is 'heretical' or 'conservative' would imply taking into consideration the interpretive pattern of the social environment of the mystic as a basis for making either claim. Katz apparently bases these claims on his own implicit definition of religion and mysticism, which could indicate that he is not taking the *total* context of the mystic into consideration, despite his contextualist approach. This line of argumentation notwithstanding, we return to Katz's less 'contextual' notion that mystical experience is intrinsically non-heretical and conservative in character, and shift our attention to his article, "The conservative character of mystical experience", which unveils his theory of models.

The argument in "The conservative character of mystical experience" is similar to the one in "Language, epistemology and mysticism". It begins by reasserting Katz's original epistemological assumption that there are no pure (unmediated) experiences; this is followed by a variety of examples from religious traditions and mystical literature intended to prove Katz's point. From an examination of these reports, Katz concludes that:

...models play an important role in providing our map of reality and of what is real and, thus, contribute heavily to the creation of experience – I

'phenomenon'. As the title "The conservative character of mystical experience" would suggest, Katz seems overly concerned with the 'conservative' characteristics of his subject and thus leaves little space for a discussion of its more radical features.

³⁶² For an analogous problem, see Jeremy Gunn's discussion in "The complexity of religion and the definition of 'religion' in international law" (2003). Here Gunn shows that in asylum cases involving persecution because of religious beliefs, the courts often base their decisions on scholarly definitions of religion that may have nothing to do with either the persecutor's or the victim's views on what constitutes a religious belief. Gunn argues that in order to determine whether an act of religious discrimination has taken place, the courts cannot take their starting place in the scholarly definitions of religion, but must consider the implicit definitions of the persecutors. We need not emphasize that injustice and unfair treatment in asylum cases would otherwise be the result.

repeat to the *creation* of experience. This is a fact to be pondered, and pondered again.³⁶³

Katz explains how he uses the term ‘models’:

By ‘model’ here I do not mean a theoretical construct as in the physical sciences, but rather the nature of ‘individuals’ who become *norms* for their tradition in a variety of ways. Such individuals become Ideals; their individuality becomes categorical; their biographies didactic. The normative individual is the medium of a universal teaching; the instrument for the revelation of more general truths. Every religious community, and every mystical movement within each community, has a ‘model’ or ‘models’ of the *ideal* practitioner of the religious life. These paradigmatic figures can be either human or divine and either male or female, with examples of each of these types to be found in the sources.³⁶⁴

According to Katz, ‘models’ have various functions, among which are: 1) to provide an “instantiation of the proper attitude and practice to be approximated or imitated by the faithful”; 2) to serve as an “existential representation of the ‘tradition’”; 3) to serve as “proof of the continuing presence of the reality of the tradition”; 4) to “bring a new revelation, e.g. Muhammad.”; 5) to “bring a new doctrine, e.g. the Buddha”; 6) to “reveal an interpretation of an older doctrine”; 7) to serve as “a ‘Founder’ of a religious community”; 8) to provide an “authoritative picture of reality”; 9) to show “what it is to be ‘human’”; 10) to over-bridge ‘above’ and ‘below’; and, 11) to serve as a “moral paradigm”.³⁶⁵ Along with “texts” and “ontologies”,³⁶⁶ these models are said to be responsible for the creation of ‘experience’ that preserves the religious tradition in the faithful follower. By imitating the ‘models’, the mystic is conserving tradition; in this way, mystical experience becomes conservative in character.

What Katz calls ‘models’, we, in keeping with William James, call ‘people of religious genius’. In this regard, some of the individuals particularly mentioned by Katz are Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, Buddha, Krishna and Confucius. Mystics are thought to imitate and idolize these individuals.

³⁶³ Katz 1983a, p. 51.

³⁶⁴ Katz 1983a, p. 43.

³⁶⁵ Katz 1983a, pp. 43-46.

³⁶⁶ Katz 1983a, p. 51.

This is why Katz believes that study of these models (along with text and ontology) will greatly enhance the “full and accurate understanding of mystical experience in both its radical and conservative modalities”.³⁶⁷ For Katz, these personalities serve as normative maps to transcendental realities that are followed by the mystics that come after. Thus he considers that a thorough study of these models and their maps should be informative as to the experiences of mystics. In light of Katz’s theory of ‘models’, a number of interrelated issues are in need of clarification and, also, correlation with the other aspects of Katz’s philosophy. Some of these clarifications and correlations require a contextualization of Katz’s theory.

5.2.1. *Katz’s theory in context*

The leading questions in the following discussion concern the double nature of Katz’s theory – the combination of contextualism and realism – and how this relates to Katz’s theory of models. First there is the question of whom or what has inspired the ‘models’. Unless Katz’s ‘models’ are exceptions to the contextual understanding that the mystic’s religious context influences her experience, we here appear to encounter an infinite regress that cannot be historically validated. And if it is Katz’s position that the ‘models’ *are* somehow exceptions to his contextual understanding of mystical experience, their experiences would seem to have been unmediated in some sense. We discuss this possibility further.

Consider, for instance, Moses, whom Katz has listed as a ‘model’. Regardless of whether or not Katz considers Moses a mystic, Moses had an experience that has played a significant role in the history of three major religious systems: that of having received the Ten Commandments. When applying Katzian contextualism to the circumstance of Moses going up Mount Sinai and coming back with the Ten Commandments, the outcome appears to contradict the traditional *religious* account of the event. First of all, both the Jewish and the Christian traditions inform us that the Commandments were *given* to Moses as a foundation for the Law to which those committed to the God of Abraham should be obedient. The fact that the Law was directly

³⁶⁷ Katz 1983a, p. 51.

given by God precludes the possibility that Moses had himself derived this particular set of rules in meditative contemplation under the influence of the religious tradition to which he was attached. It also appears to preclude the possibility that Moses was given an 'x' which he then interpreted and evaluated in accordance with the contextual conditions of his time. From Katz's realist perspective, Moses experienced God. However, if there are no 'givens' that are not also shaped by acts,³⁶⁸ how then, are we to understand Moses' reception of the Commandments without invoking the perennial interpretation of experience? The impossibility of 'givenness' in Katz's account seems at odds with his account regarding the role of 'models'.

There is, however, an alternative: Moses represents an exception to the rule that governs human nature,³⁶⁹ and the Law was given to him in a 'pure' way. As will soon be seen, this appears to be the most plausible interpretation of the Katzian perspective, although it contradicts Katz's initial assumption that there are no pure experiences. But what does this account tell us about mystical experience? The idea that Moses, whether as mystic or 'model', may have had a 'pure experience' of God tell us little more about mystical experience than that one must wait to be chosen or made exceptional by the Lord. If the mystics of the Christian or Jewish tradition idolize and imitate Moses, what does this say about them? Moses' life and activities are extraordinary by any standards and certainly no supplanting set of laws has been presented since his original reception of the Ten Commandments. Moreover, if becoming one like Moses is what mystics are intended to achieve, it can be safely said that no one has been able to accomplish this to date.

In the tradition of Islam, it is indeed customary to 'imitate' the actions of Muhammad, but this is largely connected with orthodox religious practice and does not explain the longstanding conflict between Islam as a religious system and Sufi mystical practice. Altered states of

³⁶⁸ Katz 1978a, p. 59. "All 'givens' are also the product of the process of 'choosing', 'shaping', and 'receiving'. That is, the 'given' is appropriated through acts which shape it into forms which we can make intelligible to ourselves given our conceptual constitution"

³⁶⁹ See Katz's claim that "because of the sorts of beings we are" we are prevented from having 'pure experiences' (Katz 1978a, p. 26).

consciousness are matters of controversy within Islam; as a result, the Sufis often have been marginalized because they indulge in repetitive ‘group prayer’ and contemplation: practices believed to hold the potential to alter consciousness. Although it is impossible to know whether or not Muhammad experienced a change in consciousness prior to his receipt of the Qur’an, it is generally regarded in Islam that he received the verses from the angel Gabriel without any formal preparation on his part – in a manner that resembles Moses’ receipt of the Ten Commandments. How the practice of *dhikr* within the Sufi community can be explained or described by reference to the life and practices of Muhammad is not entirely clear; this, in turn, indicates that Katz needs to further elucidate what the ‘models’ of each tradition actually explain about mystical experience per se.

Turning to the Christian traditions, it is clear that a more or less similar relation holds between the more orthodox ways of following Jesus and the experiences of Christian mystics. It must be said, however, that Christianity does not appear to stress as much as does Islam the importance of strictly following the ‘way’ of the ‘model’. In the accounts of Jesus’ life there is no mention of his having had a consciousness transforming experience that enabled him to perform miracles or resolve contemporary conflicts that had arisen from different interpretations of the Law. As with Muhammad, merely studying the life of Jesus does not appear to shed much light on what it is that Christian mystics experience or what they do to have such experiences. What, for instance, do either the Sufi’s or the Christian’s mystical experiences of unity and loving devotion to Allah or God have to do with either Muhammad or Jesus? For all the talk of recognizing differences, Katz’s particular slant on interpretation does not appear to illuminate either the differences within the religious traditions themselves or those that obtain between the mystical and the religious accounts of each tradition.

Katz, however, expresses the wish to study this issue further; thus at the end of “The conservative character of mystical experience” he explains that:

In future research I hope to extend this analysis to other features of the mystical quest such as the role of Gurus, the function of ‘discipleship’ and

the nature of mystical communities. In the interim, however, enough evidence and analysis has been introduced at least to throw suspicion on those approaches to mystical experience which treat these experiences in non-contextual ways and which choose to concentrate solely on the radical side of the phenomena. The thesis that mysticism has strong, if not dominant, conservative characteristics has at least begun to be demonstrated.³⁷⁰

Although Katz's analyses of the other 'features of the mystical quest', the 'role of the Gurus' and the 'function of discipleship' have yet to be presented, there is reason to believe that his point of view would not much differ from the 'conservatism' expressed in "The conservative character of mystical experience". Katz does recognize that mystical experience is not just a conservative phenomenon. However, in his various writings he has chosen to leave the 'radical side of the phenomena' largely unexplained. The implications of this will be briefly discussed herein.

Perhaps none of this would be of great concern if the issue were merely about whether the outcome of mystical experience is largely conservative and confirmatory or something of a more novel and radical nature. In cases where mystics are isolated from society at large, the particular character or outcome of a mystical experience would be a more or less private affair and of little social relevance in terms of scientific examination and evaluation. In cases where the phenomenon of mystical experience occurs within the confines of a given society, however, the issue of its character and outcome is one of great consequence – especially for those under the evaluative gaze. Questions of personal transformation and mental health (or illness) are at the centre of the debate over the outcome of mystical experience, with professionals, researchers and thinkers standing on different sides of the issue. For some, mystical experience is seen as something 'healthy' and 'good', both for the individual and for society at large; for others, it is seen as 'pathological' and 'bad'.³⁷¹ The apparent variety of disparate

³⁷⁰ Katz 1983a, p. 51.

³⁷¹ As an example of negative interpretation, there is the case of psychiatrist Bo Gunnar Johnson at Lillhagen Hospital, who has apparently assessed nine cases of "meditation psychosis" and concludes that: "The unanimous symptoms indicate a specific syndrome triggered by a manipulation of consciousness. The central phenomenon is a

interpretations of the experiences included by different approaches (in terms of both first- and second-hand reports) creates an ambiguity that requires interpretive patterns that are at least 'open' to the possibility that the experiences are 'positive'.³⁷²

Of course, if one does not understand what mystical experience is, it is impossible to say anything about its outcome; and in the case of Katz's theory, mystical experience is anything but well defined – i.e., Katz does not establish *precise demarcation standards*. This problem, however, does not prevent Katz from making negative judgments about certain experiences that contrast or conflict with the traditional beliefs and textual sources of the religious system in question.³⁷³ For Katz, it seems, if the experience is factually of 'God' it will have 'good' effects, and perhaps can also be classified as a 'genuine' mystical experience, but if it is 'the Devil that

special activity in the autonomous nervous system. This means an activation and overload of cognitive-emotional functions, which in predisposed individuals can trigger a process similar to psychosis and often of long duration. Since this process is risky, relatively unknown, and difficult to treat, it becomes important to contraindicate these practices, since there may be risks for activation of an uncontrollable process." These findings were published in *Läkartidningen* 37, 1984 (my translation). Johnson also notes that "religious healing has not had any convincing effect – in one case it even got worse when paranoid delusions that 'the healer' stole the power were aroused". Johnson further believes that the symptoms are indicative of a specific type of psychosis that can be directly linked to meditative practices. This conclusion appears to be based on similarities found between different hallucinations involving snakes and 'kundalin' enhancement in the spinal cord. With reference to a report of electromagnetic measurement during states described in accordance with Johnson's criteria for specific 'meditation-psychosis', Johnson concludes that "there may thus be a physiological foundation to the subjectively experienced activation".

³⁷² See, for instance, Lukoff 1985 and Lukoff 1998. Lukoff calls for the possibility of a positive interpretation of psychotic experiences and argues that there is no room for such an interpretation in DSM-IV. Lukoff (1998) suggests a "differential diagnosis between mental disorders and spiritual emergencies" on the grounds that the effects of medication are undesirable. Lukoff is critical of the fact that many practicing psychiatrists are uneducated about the nature of spiritual emergencies and uninterested in experiential reports.

³⁷³ Or, as will be shown, the particular example we deal with next seems to contradict Katz's own system of beliefs. This is why the issue of superimposing one's own interpretational pattern on the phenomenon interpreted is so important. The fact that Katz cannot set aside his own metaphysical beliefs when interpreting mystical experience reports from different religious or philosophical systems actually results in a reductive and dogmatic view.

calls' instead, the consequences will be 'bad' and the experience may not even qualify as 'mystical'. At least this is how Katz argues against Khalidas Bhattacharyya's position, in which the suspension of ontologies is a way to the "rare mystic ordinance which [Bhattacharyya's] 'holy' mind receives"³⁷⁴:

How is one sure that it is the word of God and not that of the Devil that calls? How many obscene acts have been performed on the basis of such 'visions' and 'mystical states'? We are not Abrahams and for us the possibility which Bhattacharyya's position allows of, among other things, the teleological suspension of the ethical, is out of the question. Let the 'voices' demand what they will; we must stand firm even if we err against the call and let God sort out the consequences. It is an irony of history perhaps, but we must be cautious even to a fault when dealing with such 'mystic ordinances.' As with the other self-authenticating claims, we have learnt to our dismay how dangerous such claims can be and how rationality and morality require that 'mystic ordinances' submit to their heteronomous standards if they wish to go beyond the ecstatic state itself and become efficacious in the real world of human interdependencies. If people do not fully understand this argument we should just take them to 'Homes' full of people who have 'experienced' that they are Napoleon or Jesus – and if they persist perhaps just leave them there!³⁷⁵

What is the actual point of this argument? According to Gregory, Katz means to say that:

In the task of arriving at judgements about metaphysical truth and ethical behaviour, the evidence of experience must always be subordinated to "rational principles and maxims" and "heteronomous standards." Experience must never stand as the judge, but always itself be judged and validated on the basis of reason or, in the context of religious traditions, on the basis of established revelation. In all cases it must not be left to stand as the paramount authority in metaphysical and moral matters.³⁷⁶

What this appears to mean is that we cannot be sure about the metaphysical *causal* source of the experience, so we must rely on the established interpretational basis in order to assess the outcome. 'Calls' (visions and voices) from the Devil can be conflated with 'calls' from

³⁷⁴ Gregory quotes Bhattacharyya from Katz's "Freedom and nature: a reply" (1976), in Gregory 2006, p. 222.

³⁷⁵ Katz (1976) quoted by Gregory 2006, p. 222.

³⁷⁶ Gregory 2006, p. 222.

God, and neither the mystic nor the philosopher can know which. Moreover, it is mistaken to assume that an experience can validate ‘ethical’ behaviour. Instead we must rely on the textual basis – the “heteronomous standards” that are set by the religious tradition of the experiencer. This argument straightforwardly implies that *experience* is untrustworthy and that textual sources (“established revelation”) must be used to validate the causal reality of experience. In fact, if the content of the experience contradicts the content in the ‘established revelations’, we are advised to neglect the experience and “stand firm even if we err against the call and let God sort out the consequences”. Otherwise, it is believed, a ‘self-authenticating’ claim like Bhattacharyya’s could lead to very unpleasant social consequences or even be an expression of something pathological.³⁷⁷

As has been previously noted in chapter three, *experience* seems to lose all importance in Katz’s philosophy, and one begins to think that if this is factually Katz’s point of view, why not go further and exclude experience from the interpretation of mysticism altogether. In the above quotation, experience seems to be classified in terms of causal source, although Katz never specifies what makes Abraham a ‘model’ but not Bhattacharyya. If the delimiting feature is the causal source of the experience, but no one can *know* anything about that metaphysical source, how can Katz know that the metaphysical source of Bhattacharyya’s experience is not God? Although Katz would likely never consider Bhattacharyya to be one of his ‘models’, he never really delineates the criteria by which a ‘model’ can be known. Is Muhammad the last of the ‘models’? What is it that an aspiring ‘Abraham’ needs to do or experience in order to truly reach that status? And how can we confirm that Abraham’s source was God and

³⁷⁷ As a comment to this, Gregory explains: “...what is metaphysically ‘given’ to one in one’s experience may entail the violent suppression of whole classes of people if one’s social and ethical conditioning has taught one the acceptability of repressing, prejudicing, or violently mistreating others. This was the case with white southerners in 18th century America with respect to blacks, with Brahmins in 18th century India in relation to outcasts, and with 20th century Germany with respect to Jews. In each of these historical cases, and in any number of other cases one might think of taking place today, the oppressors were conditioned not only to think of the other in particular ways, but actually to *experience* them in ways which directly fostered their systematic mistreatment” (Gregory 2006, p. 221). This is not the place to discuss these complicated issues in detail. However, it can be said that issues of ‘suppression’ have a more complex structure than simply being the result of an assumption regarding what is ‘given’.

not the Devil? Did God factually ask Abraham to sacrifice his son, or was this merely an experience shaped by Abraham's religious conditioning? Within the Jewish system of beliefs, the attempt to render a contextual interpretation of Abraham's experience would be viewed as absurd. There is, however, an explanation as to why Katz would avoid 'contextualizing' Abraham.

According to Katz, Jews have a special place in history and thus represent the main 'evidence' for the existence of Divine Providence. The following quotations were taken by Gregory from a 1994 interview entitled, "The God I believe In" as well as from a 1983 article on post-holocaust Jewish theology:

...“the Jewish people manifest a qualitatively different type of historical existence than other nations.”^[1] The sheer fact of Jewish survival alone, Katz claims in several places, is a kind of “objective evidence”^[2] for the existence of God and for a special historical management or “transcendental selection” governing Israel's history. “I can not imagine, or account for, the survival of the Jewish people apart from some kind of special history, *Heilsgeschichte* [...]”^[3], he states. And again, “I ... find Israel's very survival *the* strongest evidence both of its transhistorical vocation and the existence of Divine Providence.”^[4] The modern recreation of the State of Israel in particular he takes as an “objective evidence”^[5] of God's reality,^[6] providence,^[7] and “saving presence”^[8].³⁷⁸

In Katz's view, this 'special history' of the Jewish people is disconnected from a contextual theory of interpretation, and also from other religions:

You have a rule about how history operates; Jewish history is always the exception. The Shoah comes and out of it emerges the state of Israel. The Jews of Russia (and America) were, according to historical prognosticators, supposed to disappear; they didn't disappear. Modernity was meant to assimilate Jews; it didn't. The church came and was to conquer, and, in turn, was succeeded by a militant Islam and crusading Marxism. Jewish history is quite extraordinary in its continuity and inexplicability.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁸ Gregory 2006, p. 62. The statements numbered by me as [1], [4] and [8] in Gregory's text are quoted from Katz's 1983 article "Eliezer Berkovits's Post-Holocaust Jewish Theology" and the rest ([2, 3, 5, 6, 7]) are quoted by Gregory from an interview with Joshua O Haberman titled "The God I believe in", 1994.

³⁷⁹ Katz quoted from the 1994 interview with Haberman ("The God I believe in) by Gregory, in Gregory 2006 p 61-2

Katz's particular interpretation of the history of the Jewish people, as fascinating as it may be, reveals a fundamental problem relative to Katz's interpretation of mystical experience that seems to go beyond even the previously mentioned inconsistencies of his contextual approach. It is that while Katz appears to see only 'context' and 'interpretation' with respect to the experiences of mystics, when it comes to the 'exceptional' history of the Jewish people, he appears to see 'reality' as 'evident' and, yes, 'given'.

However difficult or impossible it may be to distinguish between experience and interpretation, Katz never mentions his role as an interpreter of mystical experience. Clearly, Katz claims that the perennialists interpret mystical experience reports inaccurately, making assumptions on metaphysical realities and not clearly realizing the difficulties involved in distinguishing between experience and interpretation. But what about Katz's interpretations? Does he distinguish between the actual events he mentions (such as the 'recreation of the state of Israel') and his interpretation of them (that this proves the existence of God)? Put more plainly, does Katz's own context – i.e., the fact that he is an explicitly Jewish philosopher with a Jewish metaphysical and theoretical outlook – in any way influence his particular interpretation of mystical experience reports?

In chapter one, we discussed the problematic nature of interpreting one metaphysical system in terms of another, and how this can give rise to serious misunderstandings if the interpretational pattern of the interpreted subject is not taken into account. If one wishes to truly understand a 'Weltanschauung' that is of a particularly foreign or alien character, it is often necessary to 'bracket' or set aside one's own interpretive pattern to make room for the entrance of the other. In the case of Katz, however, it appears that he has made no such effort and thus his interpretation of mystical reports is made from the perspective of a Jewish interpretive pattern, with all the specific metaphysical assumptions that this implies. In other words, it is highly likely that Katz's interpretation of mystical experience reports is coloured by his own Jewish experience. Thus his contextual approach has little chance of describing the activities, experiences and reports of mystics in ways that do not fundamentally clash with the self-understandings of those mystics. Mystical experience reports are not 'given' to Katz, rather they require

interpretation. Unfortunately, Katz's interpretation, as interesting as it may be, does not seem to explain either the experiences of mystics or what those experiences are likely to generate in the way of personal transformation, knowledge, cognitivity and/or moral conduct.

5.3. Conclusions and summary

This chapter began with the claim that it is not possible to establish a causal connection between a certain type of experience and a specific outcome, nor between a method of facilitation and a specific outcome. It seems that in Katz's philosophy of mysticism, the outcome of an experience is determined by the causal metaphysical factor that influences the experience.

Section 5.1 discussed Katz's claim that mystical experience cannot be verified, which, of course, is true, although it raises several issues that create difficulties for Katz's philosophy:

- It is unclear what non-verifiability is supposed to tell us about mystical experience in particular. No experience can be verified in itself, and far from all statements based on experience can be verified.
- It is extremely difficult to ascertain whether or not Katz also means to say that mystical experience is incapable of justifying belief. If so, this would be in direct contrast to the views of other epistemologists of mysticism such as Broad, Alston and Swinburne.
- Katz uses the reports of the mystics as 'evidence' for his philosophical position, contradicting his own claim that "mystical experience is not and logically cannot be the grounds for *any* final assertions about the nature or truth of any religious or philosophical position".

Section 5.2 discussed Katz's theory of 'models'. In this connection, the following problems raise the question of whether Katz's contextual approach represents a viable option for the interpretation of mystical experience reports:

- I have asked how the models became models. Katz has no explicit account of what constitutes a model, except for the fact that they are incorporated and exemplified in traditional religious accounts.
- If Katz's models are those presented by various religious traditions, the experiences of such models must be 'given', since this is what traditional religious accounts assert. This, however, seems to contradict Katz's rejection of the possibility of 'givenness' and 'pure experience'.
- If the idolization and imitation of the models of various religious systems *create* the experiences of their mystics, and such 'models' are said to have had experiences that go beyond contextual conditioning, why are the mystics that follow in their footsteps unable to set aside their contextual conditioning and achieve such states as well? If the answer is that mystics are unable to imitate their models in this respect, then one would have to ask whether the notion of 'models' has anything at all to tell us about mystical experience?

The only answer I have managed to find to these questions is that Katz interprets mystics from a Jewish interpretive pattern, an approach that is inappropriate for several reasons:

- It results in a dogmatic interpretation of mystical experiences and an inability to distinguish between conflicting views within a religious tradition (such as, for instance, the problems that arise between orthodox Muslim religionists and Sufis, or between standard Christians and Christian mystics).
- It is reductive and fails to account for the ambiguity of experience.
- If taken as paradigmatic, it can result in interpretations that fail to meet the claims of mystics and make them intelligible.

Part IV: Conclusions

Chapter 6 Aftermath

Introduction to chapter six

It appears that in this thesis I have contradicted Gregory's conclusion that

Katz's theory is a beautifully impartial, even-handed, and respectful of all mystical claims without exception. It is in fact designed to uphold these virtues.³⁸⁰

While it may certainly be the case that I have interpreted Katz's theory in a critical and possibly inaccurate way, the very fact that Katz's theory can receive such diverse interpretations as mine and Gregory's indicates that it contains elements that are either incompatible or lacking in clarity. Interpreters of mysticism require far clearer directions and explanations than are found in Katz's present formulations. Thus if Katz intends to provide the tools needed for an interpretation of mystical reports, the claims he presents need to be reformulated in certain fundamental respects and expressed in more direct and relevant terms.

My initial aim was to find a theory that could explain and help to interpret the language of mystics. Unfortunately, my own encounter with Katz's contextual approach has diminished rather than enhanced my understanding of mystical claims. On the other hand, Katz does raise a number of important issues that are fundamental in terms of advancing our understanding of mystical experience and mystical claims. Section

³⁸⁰ Gregory 2006, p. 295.

6.1 reviews several of these central themes and section 6.2 examines some alternative ways of answering the questions raised by Katz. Section 6.2 also looks at future research possibilities with respect to the study of mystical phenomena, as well as the relevance this may have for disciplines other than religious studies and *vice versa*.

6.1. Katz's contextual theory

Katz's contextual approach addresses several important issues regarding mystical experience that are in need of consideration:

1) The role of theology in religious experience.

This issue includes questions such as: what is the relation between (theological) language and (religious) experience; and, how and to what extent are the experiences of persons in various religious traditions influenced by the sacred texts of those traditions?

2) Does *mystical experience* transcend religious borders as well as the borders of *religious experience*?

This issue includes questions such as: how does mysticism relate to religion; and, are there any differences between the forms of expression/experience within a specific theological system (e.g., Islam) and the mystical forms within the same tradition (e.g., Sufism)?

3) The epistemology of mystical experience.

This issue includes questions such as: what role do general cognitive processes play in the formation and interpretation of mystical experience; and, would a common experiential core need the presupposition that there are pure experiences?

Katz has contended that his contextualist theory provides a better explanation of mystical experiences than does the perennialist point of view. This contention has been examined in this thesis relative to the four evaluative criteria presented at the outset. These criteria are here presented once again:

1) Any theory that purports to be a theory of mystical experience must be capable of precisely identifying and demarcating the

phenomena it aims to interpret and/or explain. In other words, it must *establish precise demarcation standards*.

2) Any theory that purports to be a theory of mystical experience must rest upon on a coherent theoretical foundation without intrinsic contradictions. In other words, it must exhibit *theoretical consistency*.

3) Any theory that chooses the '*subjective experiences*' of certain mystics as its '*object*' of study must avoid the tendency to interpret those experiences in ways that fundamentally distorts or disregards the self-understanding of those mystics. In other words, it must *show regard for the validity of self-understanding*.

4) Any theory that purports to be a theory of mystical experience must be capable of advancing current understandings relative to the phenomena under investigation. In other words, it must *extend the understanding of the field*.

The question is, of course, whether or not Katz's contextualist theory of mystical experience satisfies these criteria. In this thesis, I have indicated that the answer is no. Having said this, I should also say that I am aware of the possibility that this presentation may include both minor and major misunderstandings of Katz's position, and that these may have tainted the outcome of my analysis. Certain of Katz's assertions, however, are unmistakable, and they are made repeatedly and with great emphasis throughout his various writings.

Included in this category would be his assertions that: 1) there is no such thing as a pure (unmediated) experience; 2) mystical experiences are fundamentally *different* rather than *similar*; 3) the perennial common core model is mistaken and the phenomenal characteristics of experience cannot successfully outline or explain what mystical experience is; 4) mystical experience is over-determined by religious beliefs and mystics cannot escape their religious context (or pre-experiential conditioning); 5) experience cannot be distinguished from interpretation; 6) the phenomenological method is inadequate; 7) mystical experience is cognitive; 8) experience necessarily involves direction towards an *external* object; 9) experience necessarily involves an 'object'; and, 10) mystical experience conserves rather than innovates religious beliefs, and thus

tendencies towards heresy are not as characteristic of mysticism as is conservatism.

Regarding these relatively clear and straightforward assertions, several of Katz's critics have noted that they display a good deal of conceptual confusion. In large measure, this thesis can be seen as an attempt to sort this issue out. Concerning the question of 'difference' and/or 'similarity', for example, we have questioned how one can determine whether or not one thing is similar to or different from another without considering the phenomenal characteristics of experience. And with regard to the concept of 'object', we have explored what types of 'objects' might determine the nature of the mystical experience. Respecting Katz's idea of 'externality', we have asked, "according to what metaphysical system?" And as to the concept of 'pure experience', we have looked into several of its many meanings in the mystical literature. Regarding the concepts 'mysticism' and 'religion', we have asked how there can be a difference between the two, when a given form of 'mysticism' is perceived as being merely one aspect of the religious tradition of which it is a part. And in terms of the concepts 'phenomenal' and 'phenomenological', we have attempted to understand what it is that Katz is rejecting. Concerning the idea of 'cognitivity' in experience, we have tried to determine exactly what the 'cognitive' content in a mystical experience is according to Katz. We have also looked into the notions of 'experience' (what is it?), 'interpretation' (whose, and according to what interpretive pattern?) and 'context' (what elements might be included other than those that are strictly 'religious?').

The existence of so many unclear areas in Katz's contextual approach makes it difficult to see how it could extend the understanding of the field or provide precise guidelines to those seeking to understand the phenomenon of mystical experience. For his part, Katz sees the field as being dominated by perennial interpretations that use phenomenal characteristics to show that the experiences of mystics have similar experiential features across religious boundaries. Katz insists that this paradigm is mistaken and cannot successfully advance our current understanding of mystical experience. Katz's main reason for drawing this conclusion is that the phenomenal characteristics of experience are too general to outline mystical experience; his aim appears to be to replace phenomenal characteristics with the 'object' as the proper

standard for demarcating mystical experience. The 'object', as we understand Katz, appears to be the specific 'ultimate reality' (God, Allah, Brahman, etc.) of each religious tradition in the world. As to the nature of this 'object', Katz suggests that it is to some degree 'real', and that experiences 'containing' this more or less 'real' object should be analysed as 'specific ontological conditions'. On the other hand, however, he maintains a strong conviction (stated again and again throughout his writings) that the 'object' of the mystic's 'experience' is also shaped (over-determined) by the pre-experiential conditioning, background and religious context of the experiencer. These two opposite poles of understanding – the realist and the contextualist – are both included in Katz's perspective, and it is this that seems to lead his theory into the theoretical inconsistencies that have been discussed in chapters three and five. Ironically, although a phenomenological perspective (when correctly understood) would enable Katz to resolve this inconsistency and embrace both a contextualist and a realist position, he has chosen to reject both phenomenology (as he understands it) as well as the phenomenal characteristics of experience.

As hinted at above, Katz's rejection of phenomenology and the phenomenal characteristics as methodological foundations for advancing the understanding of mystical experience is based on several misunderstandings – e.g., his assumption that phenomenology entails making unwarranted metaphysical claims. However, as a result of the various ambiguities embedded in his system, it is difficult to determine how and to what extent these misunderstandings have caused Katz to make certain (irrelevant) claims about mystical experience that have hampered our understanding of the field and discouraged the use of certain important tools. If, as Katz claims, mystical experience is necessarily connected to (and even shaped by) religious systems of belief (or specific theologies), how can we then explain phenomena like: a) experiences that are not connected to a specific religious system, but nevertheless display similarities in either facilitative aspects, phenomenal characteristics and/or moral features (e.g., nature experiences); b) similarities between experiences 'shaped' by different religious traditions (e.g., the 'unitive' experience); c) the differences in the experiences and conceptions of religious people from the same religious tradition (e.g., the Sufi and the orthodox Islamic believer); and, d) religious experiences

that have no reported external reference (e.g., the Buddhist experience). The methodological elements in Katz's position thus exhibit important explanatory shortcomings that seriously undermine his 'contextual' theory of interpretation.

Other methodological problems encountered in Katz's approach concern the 'evidence' he uses to support his rejection of perennial attempts to understand mystical experience. In this regard, Katz employs his contextual model of interpretation to interpret a selection of mystical experience reports and then uses the reports so interpreted to prove that his contextual model of interpretation is more correct and/or better at analysing mystical experience reports than the perennial model of interpretation. Moreover, since Katz strongly asserts that one cannot base theoretical judgements on mystical experience claims – i.e., that mystical experience cannot validate philosophical or theological truths – it is hard to see how he could justify his own use of mystical experience claims to validate the *philosophical judgement* that the perennial approach is mistaken and that differences rather than similarities are evident in mystical experience reports.

Finally, Katz's approach to the interpretation of mystical experience reports seems to show little regard for either the validity of the mystics' self-understanding or the impact that his own interpretive pattern has on the judgments, analyses and interpretations he makes. To make this point clear, the following additional evaluative criterion is required:

- 5) Any theory that purports to be a theory of mystical experience must clearly state the functional role of the interpreter and the impact that his own pre-interpretational conditioning (or interpretive pattern) could potentially have on the results of his interpretation. In other words, the theory must *explicitly state the perspective from which the 'object' of investigation is apprehended and understood.*

If the interpretive pattern of the interpreter comes into conflict with the self-understanding of the interpreted subject, the elements that presuppose the truth of the interpreter's metaphysical system should be explicitly spelled out so that the interpreters interpretation can be clearly seen and contrasted with (or evaluated in relation to) that of the interpreted subject. If adhered to, this criterion should not only enhance

the interpreter's regard for the validity of her subject's self-understanding, but also enable her to improve the consistency of her theory and extend the understanding of the field.

The final section of this conclusion looks at future possibilities for extending our understanding of mystical experience reports, and also suggests what sort of theoretical formulation might satisfy the *five* evaluative criteria mentioned above.

6.2. The way ahead

A variety of factors need to be considered in order to advance the discussion on mystical experience. Some of the questions that relate to these factors are relevant to areas of research that are outside the disciplines directly involved with 'religious' phenomena: What do mystics and mystical experiences have to teach us about the cognitive processes involved in other types of experiences? What can mystical experience per se teach us about the general creative processes involved in learning? The phenomenon of mystical experience is also potentially relevant to disciplines such as psychology (e.g., the relationship between altered states and psychological health), psycholinguistics (e.g., language acquisition), pedagogy (e.g., learning processes), law (e.g., the interpretation of witness reports), medicine (e.g., the role of self-suggestion), anthropology (e.g., the understanding of ritual behaviour), etc.

All the above relevancies, however, depend upon the particular interpretation we give to mystical phenomena. And, to be frank, an interpretation of the type that emerges from Katz's contextual approach appears unlikely to generate much new understanding or depict mystical phenomena in ways that would make them interesting to the disciplines just mentioned.³⁸¹ In pondering what sort of interpretation might make

³⁸¹ Some examples of why this is so are: a) Katz associates altered states with pathological conditions, and thus his interpretive model is not appropriate in cases where the potential psychological benefits of mystical experience are of interest; b) if we have understood Katz correctly, language acquisition would never be an issue since language seems to be *'given'* rather than *'acquired'* in Katz's theory; c) since the notion of cognitivity seems quite contradictory in Katz's theory and the so-called mystical 'ways of knowing' remain extremely unclear, it is unlikely that Katz's perspective would contribute much to an understanding of learning processes; d) if the statement that

mystical experience more interesting and relevant to these various disciplines and *vice versa*, we would do well to consider certain aspects of investigating mystical phenomena.

Research on the phenomenon of mystical experience must be theoretically coherent and methodologically capable of accommodating a plurality of approaches, including both philosophical and empirical investigations.³⁸² In the study of mystical literature, it is certainly important to be aware of the contextual surroundings of the text, and also to recognize that sacred scriptures frequently are an important part of that context. However, it would be a mistake to focus so narrowly on the representative literature in the mystic's tradition that we end in neglecting the report's experiential dimension, or the explanatory value that this dimension potentially holds. The sacred scripture of a given religious tradition invariably receives different interpretations from contending groups within that tradition, as the example of Christianity has shown. It should thus be of value to study the particular interpretations that have informed a given mystic, as well as how that mystic is perceived from the perspective of traditional understanding. Moreover, the examination of interactional dynamics should not be limited to the mystic and her tradition's sacred scriptures, but should extend to the social and psychological structures that also play a role in how that mystic is interpreted and understood. To appreciate these

mysticism is not about 'brain-waves' constitutes a rejection of the possibility of correlating brain-states with states of consciousness, we must exclude most of the empirical research on cognitivity; and, e) without a classification of the phenomenal characteristics of experience there cannot be any correlative or intradisciplinary research.³⁸² See for instance Andresen's and Forman's proposal of an integrated methodology for the field of religious studies, with the purpose of "forg[ing] a truce in the twenty-years' methodological war that has been waging between constructivists [Katz and Proudfoot] and perennialists in the study of religion" (Andresen/Forman 2000, p. 7. *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 7, No. 11-12, 2000, pp. 7-14. The article's subtitle reads: "How the study of consciousness and mapping spiritual experiences can reshape religious methodology") These authors suggest an integration of four different aspects of methodological approaches: a) "doctrinal analysis", which includes the study of sacred text, dogma and theology; b) "social expression", which includes observation of traditions, rituals, ecclesiastical organisations and cultural life; c) "subjective experience", which includes the different types of mystical experiences like "dualistic" and "non-dualistic" and "complex experiences"; and, d) "scientific (objective) research", which includes neurobiological studies and cognitive neuroscience. Katz's focus is on a) and perhaps some of b), but only if it is limited to *religious* contextual circumstances.

influences, however, requires an examination of the interpretive pattern of the mystic as well: i.e., how the mystic understands both the sacred scripture and the interpretation it has received within her societal surroundings. A thorough examination of a given mystic's interpretive pattern requires that consideration be given to the *experiential* aspects that could be part of her interpretive pattern and concept formation. For this it is important to understand the phenomenological method not as a metaphysical system, but as a model of *experience* that can be non-judgmentally applied to any metaphysical system of beliefs that the subjects of study hold to be true.

As a model for the interpretation of subject-reports, the phenomenological model of experience is also of great potential relevance to neurobiological approaches that attempt to correlate states of consciousness with states of the brain. While the classification of the phenomenal characteristics of experience may yet be in want of further development, the main purpose of listing phenomenal characteristics is *not* to determine whether one experience is the 'same as' or 'different from' another, with the aim of adopting a common core, constructivist or contextualist stance. It is to provide an account of the differences and similarities of *experience* that can then be useful to scientists, researchers and others who are attempting to understand the cognitive, social and/or biological aspects of experience.

It is not that difficult to ascertain whether the content of one report of experience differs from another when it comes to the *object* of reference. Clearly mystics claim to have had encounters with all kinds of 'objects', as do ordinary people. There is no need for a contextual theory or for the study of sacred scripture to determine that one mystic experiences God and another Allah; this becomes more than obvious from simply reading their reports. It is also obvious that neither God nor Allah will be discovered in the 'brainwaves' of mystics, any more than the table and chair in front of me will be found in mine. Thus there can be no question of correlating a specific brain-state with an experience of God and another brain-state with an experience of Allah, and a third brain-state with an experience of tables and chairs. A 'unitive' experience, however, *can* be correlated with states of the brain so as to make scientific statements of the type: all (or some) brain-states of the type A can be correlated with a subjective experience type \square . In such studies, the

question of whether the experience involves unity with God, unity with Allah or unity with tables and chairs is not the focus. Nor do the conclusions of such studies deny either the reality of these different entities or the reality of the experience of unity, an important feature in terms of having respect for the validity of the self-understanding of the interpreted subject. And this is where there is need of interpretive models that do not merely explain away such experiences as psychopathology or instances of delusion, but instead take into account the possible positive aspects of this type of experiencing.

Whether written, spoken or signed, language needs interpretation. To understand the meaning of an experience report (whether it is in a religious, legal, medical or psychological context), we thus require a model for interpreting language. This model would have to accommodate some form of explanation of how language is acquired (or 'learned'). A central question in psycholinguistics is whether there are specific cognitive processes for language acquisition or whether general cognitive processes are involved instead. To outline an answer to this question is impossible in this limited context, just as it is impossible to give a one-sentence answer to the question of how and to what extent language affects experienced reality. However, if we turn this around and ask how and to what extent experienced reality influences language acquisition and concept formation, it may be necessary to accept some form of 'pure experience' (i.e., an experience that is not linguistically based), or perhaps the ineffable *hyletic* material that is presented in the phenomenological model of experience. This is far from providing definitive answers to questions of interest to psycholinguistics, but it may direct us towards ways of untangling the complex relation between language and experience and addressing the explanatory gaps inherent in the scientific approach to language acquisition.

The phenomenological method and model of experience could also be useful in this context, since they allow for an examination of the cognitive processes involved in all experience, regardless of the metaphysical model of reality referred to in the reports or what the interpreters of the reports think about those realities. It would certainly be unfortunate if the misunderstandings that surround the principles and methods of phenomenology were to prevent its being used in various rewarding ways.

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Appendix

Questions and answers from Katz, autumn 2006

Questions:

I. The first set of questions that arose from my reading concerns the denial of pure experience. My first concern with the proposition “There are NO pure (i.e. unmediated) experiences.” was its general character. I have not been able to figure to what extent it determines the content of your theory of interpretation. You state for example, that mystical experience is ‘over-determined’ by contextual factors. Is this based on the epistemology following from the denial of ‘pure experience’, and if yes, should we treat experience-reports in general as we treat reports of ‘mystical experience’? If we can conclude that mystical experience is for instance ‘non-cognitive’ (or not cognition-generating) based on the denial of ‘pure experience’, can we draw the same conclusion about experience in general?

These considerations have led me to the following questions:

- i) What exactly is intended by the expression ‘pure/unmediated experience’? In the article from 1978 there are several expressions used for this ‘phenomenon’, among which ‘the given’ is one. Is the notion of ‘unmediated/pure experience’ to be understood as ‘the given’ of phenomenology as well as the ‘intuited’ knowledge of Lao Tzu? And is the *Erfahrung* without *Erlebnis* of Kant, as well as ‘the original flux’ of James also included in the denial?
- ii) In ‘Language, epistemology, and mysticism’ the denial of ‘pure experience’ is first labelled an ‘assumption’, then an ‘epistemological fact’ and in ‘The conservative character of mystical experience’ it is labelled a ‘working hypothesis’ – what label is most accurate? What part of the argument is it – is it a conclusion or a premise? What role does the assumption play in the contextual theory as a whole? Is this assumption/working hypothesis/epistemological fact necessary and does the contextual approach depend on the assumption?
- iii) How exactly does the notion of ‘pure experience’ relate to ‘mystical’ or ‘religious’ experience? Since the contextual theory of interpretation is addressing mystical experience reports, not pure experience reports, it would seem that an epistemology that is outlined mainly through its exclusion of ‘pure experiences’ would not suffice as a basis for conclusions concerning the cognitive character of mystical experience reports. And again, if the conclusions on the cognitiveness of mystical experience are based on the denial of pure experience, should this not also affect all experience in the same way?

II. The second set of questions concern the delimitation of ‘mystical’ in experience. Concerning the questions of a common core in mystical experience, you direct a serious amount of criticism towards the ability of ‘perennial’ interpreters of mystical experience to delineate mystical from other forms of experience. If I understand you correctly, you do not believe there is a common core in mystical experience, and prefer a list of

mystical-experience reports as a means of picking out the reports for interpretation. This leaves me wondering:

- i) Without the phenomenal characteristics of experience, how is it possible within the contextual model to discern mystical experience from other kinds of experience? There are indications in your article that it is the object of the mystic's experience that makes the experience 'mystical', is that correct?
- ii) Is there any way to discern between a mystical experience and a religious experience in the contextualist approach of interpretation of mystical reports?
- iii) I have also wondered what role, if any, the denial of pure experience plays for the conclusion that there is no common core to mystical experience.

III. A third important issue that has also been reflected in the critical reviews of your article concerns the over-determination of experience. Keeping in mind that you consider experience 'over-determined' by contextual/historical/psychological/linguistic factors, I was surprised to find that you also think that "beliefs shape experience, just as experience shapes beliefs". To me this seems contradictory, on account of the following:

- i) How can experience *shape* beliefs when experience is 'over-determined' by belief and other contextual factors? It seems that on the contextual approach the 'over-determination' of experience stretches to encapsulate all aspects of it, including the autonomy that experience would require to 'shape' anything. What does the autonomy of experience consist in when it 'shapes beliefs'?
- ii) Taking the 'over-determination' of experience as a dominant characteristic, I have also wondered what it is that the mystics interpret when they have 'mystical' experiences. What is the object of their interpretation?

IV. A final question that has puzzled me is whether you consider that mystical experiences are cognitive or not. That the mystical experience can not be "translated into reasons" I have interpreted as "mystical experiences are non-cognitive". Some of your interpreters claim this is not so. Do you consider the mystical experiences cognitive or cognition-generating?

Answers:

Here are some thoughts in reply to the questions you posed about my views on mystical experience.

- 1) The answer to question one in your question 1 is "yes" The answer to your second question in your question 1 is "no" as we need to recognize that mystical experience is not exactly like "experience in general." But it is not altogether different either.
- 2) I do not hold that mystical experience is non-cognitive.
- 3) In answer to your question about "pure/unmediated experience" I mean to refer to a direct form of knowledge of "the thing in itself" without any conceptual (or other) mediation.
- 4) I would think that calling the denial of pure experience "a working hypothesis" is best. I do so because I do not want to be dogmatic about the possibility I am wrong. (Though to date I do not think anyone has shown that I am wrong.)
- 5) Whether the contextual approach in all forms depends on this "working hypothesis" I am not sure - For myself, however, the answer is yes. This dependency does exist.
- 6) I am not sure what it is you are after in your question III. So I will not attempt to reply.
- 7) Yes. I reject the "Common core" position. This, however, does not preclude distinguishing mystical experience from general experience. Mystical experience has, in each discrete instance, specific phenomenological conditions that mark it as mystical.
- 8) Yes one can distinguish mystical from religious experience. There will be areas that seem to overlap and about which one can argue but this distinction is not hard to posit.
- 9) As to your II. III: the denial of pure experience is for me, separate from, but related to, the denial of the common core claims insofar as these claims are usually of the pure experience variety.
- 10) As to my view that "exp shapes belief" as well as the contrary - to deny this would be to deny reality, i.e., novelty, and the possibility - at least - of radical novelty. I think, that one must at least allow for these possibilities in religious (as well as other) forms of life and experience.
- 11) As to your question III.III: I do not want to deny the reality of mystical experience - this I grant, as a given from which one proceeds. I begin by allowing the claim for the Ultimate Object - whatever that is - as claimed by the mystic. I then ask: "Why does He or She know Reality (whatever it is) the way that they do?." Thus I never deny the object of the claims for mystical experience whatever the Object claimed is.
- 12) No - you have misinterpreted my view that mystical experience cannot be "translated into reasons" as meaning they are non-cognitive. The cognitive nature of these claims is not the issue - one can have cognitive claims that are not verifiable and thus cannot serve as decisive proof of an argument. Cognitivity and verifiability, etc., are concepts that must be distinguished. You conflate them incorrectly.